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Peer Educators in National Panhellenic Conference Sororities

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Peer Educators in National Panhellenic Conference Sororities

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I cannot remember exactly why I decided to write a thesis, all I know is that I was curious: curious about my topic, curious about the process of research, and curious about what challenges or successes I might encounter. At times, I was unsure there would be enough time or participants to complete it and I am thankful for those who encouraged me to persevere. Additionally, I had to learn how to put my passion for the topic (also known as personal bias as I have learned) aside so I could impartially analyze my participants' experiences and let their stories shine. If not for brutally honest mentors and difficult conversations, this study would not be in its current, mostly impartial form. Through all the surprises and obstacles, this process has taught me patience and how far I can push myself as a researcher.

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Abstract

National Panhellenic Conference (NPC) member organizations have numerous officer positions that might be informally defined as peer educators based on their position responsibilities. Little is known about these officers' experiences as peer educators, the amount of training they receive, and their effectiveness in providing relevant and purposeful programs for their chapters. The purpose of this study was to better understand peer educators' experiences within NPC sororities. If the experiences and leadership development of peer educators in NPC sororities are better understood, more can be done to support them in creating meaningful programs and services for their sisters. By supporting small groups of student leaders, there is the potential that thousands of women can experience a more meaningful sorority life experience. The study's findings helped expand the understanding of the peer educators' experiences in NPC sororities by revealing the purpose they perceive as integral to their roles within the chapters and by illuminating how they are trained and supported in their roles. Three prominent findings emerged from this study: 1) serving as a resource for sisters; 2) varied training experiences and preparation levels; and 3) the importance of peer support networks. Additionally, these findings reinforced the lack of understanding surrounding these women's experiences due to the diversity of their roles and experiences and the responses collected during the study. This study also presents recommendations for NPC, inter/national sorority headquarters, and on-campus fraternity and sorority life offices on ways to improve peer mentors' training experiences, and recommendations for future research.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction

Peer Educators

The use of peer educators occurs in numerous higher education programs and services, from health and wellness to leadership development. The earliest form of peer education started almost accidentally with resident advisors in housing and has since expanded to various higher education functional areas (Ganser & Kennedy, 2012). Despite the long history of peer education in academia, it is difficult to define the peer educator role due to the unique contextual characteristics of programs that utilize peer educators (Williams, 2011). However, it is generally understood that peer educators provide guidance, leadership, and support to other students through a variety of means such as academic advising, orientation, residence life, counseling (both personal and career), and health education to assist with student success (Ender & Newton, 2000; Ganser & Kennedy, 2012; Gould & Lomax, 1993; Winston & Ender, 1988).

Fraternities and Sororities

Research on fraternity and sorority membership has consistently explored negative or harmful issues such as alcohol abuse (Borsari & Carey, 1999; Tampke, 1990; Wechsler, Davenport, Dowdall, Moeykens, & Castillo, 1994; Wechsler, Kuh, & Davenport, 2009), hazing (Drout & Corsoro, 2003; Shaw & Morgan, 1990), and sexual violence (Bleecker & Murnen, 2005: Kalof, 1993; Koss & Gaines, 1993; O'Sullivan, 1991). There is a growing body of research debating the positive and negative cognitive effects of joining a fraternity or sorority (Asel, Seifert, & Pascarella, 2009; Pascarella, Flowers, & Whitt, 2009; Pike, 2003; Pike & Askew, 1990). In addition, more researchers have begun focusing on leadership development within these organizations (Atkinson, Dean & Espino, 2010; Biddix & Underwood, 2010; Dugan

2008 & 2011b). Little attention, however, has been given to the types of training available for chapter officers and its effectiveness in preparing them for their roles.

Peer Educators in Fraternal Organizations

Most social fraternities and sororities include leadership and character development in their public values, mission statements, or purpose statements (Leonard, 1998; Taylor, 2010). Many fraternal organizations' inter/national offices sponsor programs for collegiate members that focus on building character, developing leadership skills, and learning how to improve their chapter. To accomplish these ideals at the chapter level, fraternities and sororities have various officer positions devoted to supporting chapter and new member education. In addition, these organizations often have officer positions focused on academics or scholarship, housing, ritual or fraternity appreciation, risk management, and standards. Based on the roles they play, many of these student leaders might be informally defined as peer educators for their organizations (Appendix A). Little is known about these members' experiences as peer educators, the amount of training they receive, and their effectiveness in providing relevant and purposeful programs for their chapters.

Many fraternity and sorority inter/national headquarters offer members personal growth, leadership, and officer development opportunities through regional and national training programs. However, officer training often only comes from either selective inter/national office sponsored leadership programs and regional conferences or general leadership workshops hosted by campus-based fraternity/sorority life offices (Taylor, 2010). In today's educational climate where every curriculum, program, and event must be justifiable, it is troublesome that training for fraternity and sorority officers, such as peer educators, is only for elite members or only accessible at certain times of the year (Biddix, Matney, Norman, Martin, 2014).

Problem Statement

NPC member organization mission statements and purposes propose high ideals; but how are they upholding those principles (Taylor, 2010)? While NPC's vision is "Advancing the Sorority Experience Together" there are few easily identifiable resources on its website, and from personal experience, little direct aid to campus Panhellenic chapters. By hosting the inaugural College Panhellenic Academy in January 2015 (National Panhellenic Conference, 2015), NPC is taking steps to directly better support collegians, but more can be done to help develop officers who serve as peer educators. These student leaders serve an important role in fulfilling their organizations' stated purposes, yet little is understood about their experiences, how they are trained or supported, and what they gain from their experience. Serving as a peer educator has been shown to increase students' growth in learning domains often associated with leadership development (Wawrzynski, LoConte, & Straker, 2011). However, there is little direct evidence that peer educators in sororities experience similar gains. If the experience and leadership development of peer educators in NPC sororities is better understood, more can be done to support them in creating meaningful programs and services for their sisters. By supporting small group of student leaders, there is the potential that thousands of women can experience a more meaningful sorority life experience.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to better understand peer educators' experiences within National Panhellenic Conference (NPC) sororities. This study's goal was to initiate a discussion on peer educators' experiences in NPC sororities with the hope of inspiring further research and increasing student affairs practitioners' understanding of this student leader population. To accomplish these goals, I first identified officer positions with responsibilities and duties that

aligned with peer educator characteristics (Appendix A). Once identified, I interviewed women who had previously served in these roles. The interviews focused on their overall experience, the training and support they received, and the skills and competencies they developed in their roles.

Research Questions

There are three research questions central to this study's purpose:

1. What are the experiences of peer educators in an NPC sorority at the focus institution?

2. Do NPC peer educators at the focus institution receive training and support while serving in their roles?

3. What skills or competencies do NPC peer educators in their position?

Terminology

The following definitions are solely for the purpose of providing context to the study.

Fraternal Organizations – Fraternities and sororities, also known as Greek-letter organizations, established at college and universities and founded with the purpose to bring men or women together through shared values or interests; sometimes referred to as "social fraternities and sororities" or "Greek Life" in the context of higher education (Harms, Woods, Roberts, Bureau, & Green, 2006; Taylor, 2010).

Peer Educator – Undergraduate students who provide guidance, leadership, and support to other students through a variety of means such as academic advising, orientation, residence life, counseling (both personal and career), and health education to assist with student success (Ender & Newton, 2000; Ganser & Kennedy, 2012; Gould & Lomax, 1993, Winston & Ender, 1988).

Summary

Peer educators are one of the earliest forms of student leaders in higher education (Ganser & Kennedy, 2012). They serve a vital role in assisting in students' success at colleges and universities through a variety of functions (Ender & Newton, 2000; Ganser & Kennedy, 2012; Gould & Lomax, 1993; Winston & Ender, 1988). One area of peer education that has not often been explored is fraternity and sorority officers who exist to support the development and success of their brothers and sisters. In an effort to assist in the fulfillment of their organizations' ideals, these student leaders should receive specialized training and support. Yet there is little information or resources on the NPC's website to help facilitate these trainings and little is known about the needs of NPC peer educators. Furthermore, there is little centralized information on the training NPC chapter officers receive, let alone peer educator positions, on NPC and its member organization's websites. While inter/national headquarters provide numerous inter/national and regional leadership conferences and programs, member access to these programs is often limited (Taylor, 2010). Additionally, though studies have shown that men and women experience differences in their fraternal organization involvement (Kuh & Arnold, 1992; Pascarella, Edison, Whitt, Nora, Hagedorn, & Terenzini, 1996; Pike & Askew, 1990; Whipple, 1998), there is minimal research on women's experiences as peer educators in NPC sororities. If peer educators are to receive better training and support, their experiences in these roles must be better understood. With a focus on these issues, this study investigated peer educators' experiences in NPC sororities, concentrating on their training experiences, support systems, and development of skills and competencies.

Organization of Study

  This study is organized into five chapters. In Chapter One, the study's topic, purpose, and research questions were introduced. Chapter Two reviews the relevant literature related to the topic, including leadership development, peer educator training, and fraternal organization leadership development. Chapter Three outlines the study's exploratory case study format. The findings of the study are presented in Chapter Four and the implications for practice and future research are discussed in Chapter Five.

Chapter 2: Review of Literature

College Student Leadership Development

Traditionally, leadership has been defined within the constraints of holding a specific position or a collection of certain personal traits. This model of leadership was limiting as it suggested only a select group of people was capable of becoming leaders. Within the past 30 years, the concept of leadership has shifted from these past constraints to become more "relational, process-oriented, service-directed, and systems-focused" (Haber, 2011, p. 66). Relational models of leadership, such as the Social Change Model of Leadership (Komives & Wagner, 2009); the Relational Leadership Model (Komives, Lucas, & McMahon, 2007); and Emotional Intelligence and Leadership (Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2002), reflect this new outlook and shape many leadership programs on college campuses. Where there was once a singular model of leadership, there are now many multiple models. These models better reflect the experiences of undergraduate students and provide a practical lens in which to frame their development. This makes it possible to utilize a leadership development model that best fits the goals and learning outcomes of a leadership program or student organization.

Leadership development is increasingly recognized as an important learning outcome in higher education and considered part of many institutional mission statements (Boatman, 1999; Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education, 2009). Within the university or college environment, students are at a variety of developmental levels and have varied pre-existing beliefs about leadership, which must be taken into consideration when planning leadership training programs. Komives, Longerbeam, Owen, Mainella, and Osteen (2006) discussed the development of student attitudes towards leadership in the Leadership Identity Development (LID) theory. LID theory states students move from a hierarchal view of

leadership to a relational one during their leadership identity development journey. Harms et al. (2006) found similar patterns in their summary of the literature on leadership frameworks found in student organizations. They identified three approaches to leadership development: 1) objective; 2) subjective; and 3) positive. The objective approach focuses on the hierarchy of power through formal leadership positions, the subjective approach is tied to a member's informal influence within the organization, and the positive approach melds the previous approaches with a focus on the characteristics of good leader. Caza and Rosch (2014) recognized a gap in the literature and explored students' pre-existing beliefs on leadership. They conducted a quantitative study using two data sets from an institution's Multi-Institutional Study of Leadership (MSL). These scholars found that students with minimal formal leadership training held a strong set of beliefs about who leaders are and what leadership is, which tended to favor traditional beliefs about leadership. Dugan's (2006a) study suggested that students relate more to the relational leadership values, rather than the more traditional style of leadership (. However, this study included students of all ages and experiences, so some students may have been previously introduced to the idea of relational leadership. Since students are at various places along the leadership development continuum and may have pre-existing ideas about leadership, it is important that individuals who train and provide support to student leaders recognize the unique areas of potential growth for each individual. Dugan (2011a) has also called for an increased focus on uncovering the best methods for engaging students in leadership development because leadership development programs are undermined by the oversimplification of leadership assumptions.

Leadership Development and Gender

Gender differences in leadership style and effectiveness have been thoroughly studied over the past 50 years: however, there is little consensus and studies are often contradictory (Dugan, 2006a; Northouse, 2001). In several studies, women favored the transformational leadership style and were perceived as more relational, democratic leaders (Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt, & van Engen, 2003; Eagly & Johnson, 1990). In his study assessing students' development in the eight components of the Social Change Model of Leadership, Dugan (2006a) found that women scored higher than men did across all eight components. However, Posner (2009) uncovered no statistically significant differences between men and women when comparing their Student Leadership Practices Inventory results (Kouzes & Posner, 2003; Posner, 2004). Other studies, focusing mainly on workplace management, have also found little to no differences between male and female leaders (Engen, Leeden, & Willemsen, 2001; Oshagbemi & Gill, 2003; Powell, 1990).

However, Eagly and Carili (2003) raised an interesting point on some of the potential reasons for the lack of data on gender differences in leadership. They found female leaders face both advantages and disadvantages as leaders for a number of reasons including organizations have adapted to value relational leadership styles, yet there are still cultural stereotypes and norms that create a double standard for female leaders. Andersen and Hansson (2011) also questioned how the organizational type might influence how leaders behave and that this could explain differences in leadership styles.

Rosch et al. (2014) demonstrated the importance of considering gender when choosing leadership development models. In their qualitative study, the researchers analyzed the Personal Development Plans of 249 undergraduate participants in a Leadership Certificate Program. At

the beginning of the program, participants created two goals related to their leadership development. The researchers found Caucasian women's goals focused on the improvement of a group and were trait-oriented; whereas Caucasian men's goals were more focused on their personal development and skill development. These findings support the idea that women and men approach leadership development differently and that the gender demographics of a group should be considered when designing leadership development programs.

Leadership Development in Student Organizations

Students in campus-based organizations also learn and develop leadership skills through their involvement (Cress, Astin, Zimmerman-Oster, & Burkhardt, 2001; Dugan, 2006b; Logue, Hutchins & Hector, 2005; Posner, 2004). Dugan (2011b) created a taxonomy of student organizations to examine their influence on the development of socially responsible leadership (Higher Education Research Institute, 1996) and found statistically significant higher measures in organizations thought of as "traditional[ly] collegiate" (Dugan, 2011b, p. 24). The organizations identified as socially responsible fell into the following categories of the taxonomy: social collegiates, cultural collegiates, identity and expression leaders, and social recreators. In another study using the Student Leadership Practices Inventory (Grandzol, Perlis, & Draina, 2010), collegiate varsity athletic team captains report significant leadership gains when compared to their teammates (Kouzes & Posner, 2003; Posner, 2004). While this might be because seniors were more than two-thirds of the captains and freshman represented half of the team members, it still signifies that the captains learned significant and meaningful leadership skills.

Learning Outcomes for Peer Educators

Numerous researchers have found that undergraduate students experience personal and professional growth and development as peer educators (Badura, Millard, Peluso, & Ortman, 2000; Badura, Millard, Johnson, Stewart, & Bartoloemi, 2003; Good, Halpin, & Halpin, 2000; Holland & Huba, 1989; Micari, Streitwieser, & Light, 2006; Rice & Brown, 1990; Sawyer, Pinciaro, & Bedwell, 1997). Until recently, however, researchers often did not define and categorize the learning outcomes for peer educators (Bernert & Mouzon, 2001; Wawrzynski et al., 2011). Recognizing this lack of knowledge, in 2004, the BACCHUS Peer Education Network launched the first national, multi-year research project on peer educator learning outcomes called the National Peer Educator Study (NPES) (Wawrzynski et al., 2011). In 2011, Wawrzynski and colleagues conducted a mixed methods study using NPES data as a growth-assessment to learn more about peer educator learning outcomes. The researchers found peer educators showed progress in all six learning domains associated with peer education: cognitive complexity; practical competence; intrapersonal competence; interpersonal competence; knowledge acquisition, construction, integration, and application; humanitarianism and civic engagement. Wawrzynski et al. (2011) also found students made better decisions concerning both academic and social behaviors after serving as a peer educator.

Peer educators gain more concrete skills that may benefit them upon entering the workforce after graduation. Drawing on Arnett's (2000) theoretical framework of emerging adulthood, Dennett and Azar (2011) argued peer educators also gain valuable exposure to new beliefs and solidify their own values through their roles. By serving as a peer educator, students experience adult responsibilities such as learning to negotiate their "public persona" and prioritizing conflicting tasks (Dennett & Azar, 2011, p. 13). In a study on the effects of peer

educator training, students reported improvements in leadership skills and position relevant knowledge (Badura et al., 2000). Puchkoff and Font-Padron (1990) in their study found peer educators acquired professional development and job-related skills that assisted them in furthering their education or in their first jobs. Collectively, these studies suggest peer educators can benefit from their leadership roles by learning skills and competencies that will serve them well after their peer educator experience has ended.

Leadership Development in Fraternal Organizations

Fraternity and sorority membership can create an interesting dilemma due to the ways in which members perceive and enact leadership (Hevel, Martin, & Pascarella, 2014; Hughes & Winston, 1987). Because little research exists on the role of peer educators in fraternal organizations, this section focuses on the perceptions of leadership (Harms et al., 2006), educational outcomes of chapter leaders (Long & Snowden, 2011) and the leadership development programs utilized by inter/national offices (Biddix & Underwood, 2010; Taylor, 2010; Reuter, Baker, Hernandez, & Bureau, 2012).

Perception of Leadership

In a quantitative study on the relationship between leadership and personality traits, Harms et al. (2006) found authority in a fraternal organization was not dependent on the member holding a formal officer position. Length of membership and perception of fellow chapter members were more influential than holding a formal title. In another quantitative study, Long and Snowden (2011) focused on differences between the educational outcomes of fraternal organization officers and non-officers. They found officers had significantly higher educational gains in eight of the nine categories, which included leadership skills, when compared to non-officers. Even though chapter members may not define leadership as holding a formal officer

position, officers still benefit in a variety of ways from their roles. Adams and Keim (2000) administered the Student Leadership Practices Inventory to 233 undergraduate fraternal organization affiliated students to investigate their leadership practices. One of the study's findings indicated that male presidents rated their effectiveness higher than their general members did and sorority members rated their president's effectiveness higher than the female presidents' self-evaluation. This reveals a gap in the leadership abilities of both male and female chapter leaders, either due to lack of confidence or inability to receive feedback (Adams & Keim, 2000). These studies demonstrate that fraternal organizations may perceive leadership as emerging both from informal influence and from a formal title.

Leadership Development

Biddix and Underwood (2010) analyzed the short- and long-term effects of a fraternity's inter/national office organized leadership development program using existing survey data. They found multiple positive correlations between the leadership development program and participants' levels of involvement and engagement with the fraternity. Immediate leadership involvement of participants included almost two-thirds who took on an officer or volunteer role within the fraternity, almost half served on their chapter's executive board, and many were elected as chapter president or pledge educator. In addition to these tangible leadership roles, participants believed they developed the tools to enact change in the chapter or community and became more connected to the fraternity as a whole, not just their chapter, due to the program. This increase of involvement has positive implications for how inter/national offices' leadership development programs can result in the creation of peer educators at the chapter level.

In a similar study, Reuter et al. (2012) analyzed data from the fourth year of a multi-year longitudinal study on a chapter-level development program, the Lambda Chi Alpha Learning

Model (LCALM). Created by Lambda Chi Alpha fraternity in 2006, the LCALM's purpose was to improve the maturational development of its members based on related research and the organization's Seven Core Values. Using quantitative methods, Reuter et al. sought to assess possible changes in member's self-awareness due to the LCALM and to measure individual chapters' usage of the program. Results from their analysis revealed that chapter members who frequently utilized the LCALM demonstrated higher levels of self-awareness than members in chapters that did not implement the program at similar levels. For the purposes of this literature review, the most significant implication of this study was impact of the LCALM's emphasis on peer influence. The program encouraged members to share their experiences, values, and weaknesses with other members, which increased the effectiveness of the LCALM's purpose, self-awareness.

Martin, Hevel, and Pascarella (2012) questioned whether fraternities and sororities assist in the development of socially responsible leadership in first-year college students. In a longitudinal, multi-institutional study with various controls placing emphasis on membership in a fraternal organization, Martin et al. (2012) found significant positive gains in the citizenship and change components. They followed up their study a few years later to determine if students retained the positive gains for socially responsible leadership in their fourth year of college (Hevel et al., 2014). Controlling again for variables other than their fraternal organization membership, the study showed no significant effect on the participants' development of socially responsible leadership. These two studies show that while members of fraternal organizations display early gains, there are no lasting effect into their final years in college. Hevel et al. (2014) suggested that this may be the result of the often-intensive new member education programs first-year students experience, in comparison to the older members who might have stopped

investing time in the organization. This study suggested the need for continued leadership programming for all chapter members if organizations desire continue to building on gains made in the first year of membership.

In a quantitative survey sent to the inter/national offices of each NPC sorority, Taylor (2010) examined the types of leadership programs offered by the member organizations to determine whether they met the leadership development needs of women. The list of developmental needs was created after reviewing the literature on women's leadership development. Eighteen of the 26 NPC member organizations were represented in Taylor's (2010) analysis. All 18 organizations reported offering some type of leadership programming on a national scale and 88.9% provided similar programs at a regional level. Most programs were offered through leadership institutes and organization-affiliated traveling consultants facilitated the programs. Respondents reported that their organizations' programs met most of the identified leadership development needs of women, but two concepts were notably absent: developing self-confidence and finding voice. This was the only study found for this literature review that exclusively studied NPC sorority leadership programs.

Gender Differences in Fraternal Organizations

Despite numerous studies indicating that aspects of fraternal organizations affect men and women differently (Kuh & Arnold, 1992; Pascarella, Edison, Whitt, Nora, Hagedorn, & Terenzini, 1996; Pike & Askew, 1990; Whipple, 1998), the majority of research on Greek-letter organizations has either focused solely on the male experience or grouped fraternities and sororities together (Biddix et al., 2014). This is disconcerting as the differences between male and female development has long been researched (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986; Gilligan, 1982). In addition to experiencing their organizations differently, studies have

shown differences between men and women's leadership styles and even their goals for their organizations (Boatwright & Egidio, 2003; Eagly & Carli, 2003; Rosch, Boyd, & Duran, 2014). Another point of difference can be found in their preferred values, fraternity men valued conformity and leadership while sorority women valued support and benevolence (Callais, 2002; Testerman, Keim, & Karmos, 1994). Furthermore, women tend towards perfectionism (Landa & Bybee, 2007), while men are preoccupied with conforming to the college male stereotype, such as "frat brother" or "party animal" (Ashmore, Del Boca, & Beebe, 2002). This difference in values is reflective of the purpose behind the founding of these organizations and should not be overlooked (Turk, 2004). It is partially due to these reasons that this study will focus only on sorority peer educators' experiences.

Summary

With the increased emphasis on leadership development in higher education, peer education provides opportunities for students to practice and hone their skills as leaders (Good et al, 2000; Micari et al., 2006). Numerous researchers have shown students who serve as peer educators report gains across a variety of cognitive, interpersonal, intrapersonal, leadership capacity, and value efficacy domains (Badura et al., 2000; Dennett & Azar, 2011; Puchkoff & Font-Padron, 1990; Wawrzynski et al., 2011). While the benefits of serving as a peer educator increasingly are recognized, minimal research has been conducted to discover and better understand the most effective ways to train peer educators. For these student leaders to have the desired affect on their peers, their experience must be better understood.

Similarly, I was unable to identify published research on the training practices or experiences of sorority peer educators. Despite evidence of potential positive gains for both the peer educators and general members, there is no identified research on trainings offered by

inter/national offices or campus fraternity and sorority life offices specifically for these roles.

Researchers have found that numerous inter/national offices offer leadership education

programs, but there are still questions on how effective they are at reaching a majority of

members or if there are any lasting effects on non-officer members (Biddix & Underwood, 2010;

Long & Snowden, 2011; Taylor, 2010). This study seeks to combine these two research threads,

peer education and leadership development in sororities, to better understand the experience and

training needs of NPC sorority officers that may be taking on the role of peer educator.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to investigate the experiences of National Panhellenic Conference sorority peer educators at Southeast University, a large, public research university in the Southeast. These officers are tasked with creating developmentally appropriate educational programs and interventions for their peers; yet, there is little evidence in the literature on the ways in which inter/national organizations or on-campus fraternity and sorority life offices provide their peer educators with purposeful support. This study sought to better understand NPC peer educators' experiences at the focus institution, in order to generate transferable themes and to identify potential methods of support or training for NPC peer educators.

Research Questions

There are three research questions central to this study's purpose:

1. What are the experiences of peer educators in an NPC sorority at the focus institution?

2. Do NPC peer educators at the focus institution receive training and support while serving in their roles?

3. What skills or competencies do NPC peer educators develop in their position?

Method

Due to the limited participant pool and a desire to generate depth, rather than breadth, of understanding, the method chosen for this study was a qualitative multiple case study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Since this study addressed a gap in the literature, it is largely exploratory. Qualitative research therefore was an appropriate match for the study's purpose, as it allows for rich data to be gleaned from the small sample size. Additionally, case studies are well suited to

understanding the practical implications of phenomena (Flyvbjerg, 2006), such as peer educator training in NPC sororities. Case studies explore a specific unit of analysis in a bounded system; meaning, what is being studied is limited or has a special characteristic (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The bounded system in this case study was the NPC community at Southeast University and the individual peer educators are the unit of analysis (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). These NPC peer educators' unique experiences at this particular institution defined the themes identified in this study. However, the multiple case study format allowed possible variances in the participants' experiences to be the result of their affiliation and not an overall theme. Finally, case studies allow for both the creation of broad themes and analysis of participants' unique experiences to coexist in the study (Flyvbjerg, 2006).

Document analysis revealed that each NPC sorority at the focus institution has officer positions that include peer educator characteristics (See Appendix A). Therefore, this study focused on these officers' training experiences, support networks, and skills or competencies developed while in their position. To develop a rich understanding of their experiences, I conducted in-depth, individual interviews with NPC peer educators. These interviews explored the peer educators' experiences with training, support networks, and what they believe they have "gained" from the position.

Context

This study focused on the origin and effectiveness of peer educator training and support for officers and possible learning outcomes achieved by peer educators in the 13 NPC member chapters at Southeast University. Located in the Southeast, the focus institution is a large, public research institution with a well-established fraternity and sorority community. Approximately

15% of the student body is a member of a social fraternal organization and they are usually highly involved students across campus.

Participants

The participants for this study identified as women in one of the 13 NPC chapters at the focus institution who held a chapter officer position that contained peer educator characteristics. A peer educator is defined as a student who provides guidance, leadership, and support to other students through a variety of means such as academic advising, orientation, residence life, counseling (both personal and career), and health education in order to assist in the success of students at the institution (Ender & Newton, 2000; Ganser & Kennedy, 2012; Gould & Lomax, 1993). Participants were in their sophomore, junior, or senior year at the Southeast University. Most collegiate members of sororities are 18-22 years old, and at the focus institution, a majority of NPC sorority women identify as White. Chapter membership total at the focus institution was set at 186 women at the time of this study and chapters are housed in organization-owned facilities built on university-owned land.[1] As of September 2015, the total NPC community was approximately 2,400 women.

Criterion sampling was used to identify prospective participants for the study. This type of sampling allows for the selection of participants based on a certain characteristic (Creswell, 2013), in this case the characteristic is a peer educator in a NPC sorority. There will be some variation in the exact position each participant held in their sorority, but each position contains peer educator characteristics.

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[1] Chapter total is a term used to denote the maximum allowable chapter membership number, which is set by the campus fraternity and sorority life office. Chapters who are at or above total may not participate in continuous open bidding, an informal recruitment method. This number is also a signifier of chapter/community health and vitality by campus, National Panhellenic, and inter/national organization officials.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Name (pseudonym)	Age	Race/ Ethnicity	Classification	Chapter Affiliation (pseudonym)	Year joined chapter	Number of years in chapter	Number of positions held	Position(s) discussed for study
Carrie	20	Caucasian	Junior	Zeta Beta Zeta	Freshman	3	1	Scholarship
Taylor	20	Caucasian	Senior	Theta Pi Gamma	Freshman	3	2	New Member Education
Vanessa	21	White/ Caucasian	Senior	Gamma Psi Alpha	Sophomore	3	2	Facilities Operations
Mary Kate	22	White	Senior	Theta Pi Gamma	Freshman	4	6	New Member & Continuing Education
Nora	22	Caucasian	Senior	Delta Nu	Sophomore	3	1	Treasurer
Stephanie	21	Caucasian	Senior	Mu Gamma Sigma	Freshman	3.5	2	Treasurer
Olivia	20	Caucasian	Junior	Zeta Beta Zeta	Freshman	3	2	New Member Educator

Analysis of Southeast University's NPC organizations' constitutions revealed some

officer positions had peer educator responsibilities (See Appendix A). Chapter presidents or

general chapter members recommended former officers who met the criteria for participation.

Chapter presidents were contacted with information about the study and a request to contact

applicable officers. Additionally, general chapter members identified prospective participants

during a pilot study conducted in Spring 2015. When granted permission, women holding

officer positions that contained peer educator characteristics were contacted with a request to

schedule an interview. Participation in the study was voluntary and self-selected.

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Data Collection

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Instrument

As with all qualitative research, I was the main instrument of data collection due to my

role in conducting all interviews, transcription, and data analysis (Creswell, 2013). My

interpretation of the participants' experiences with training, support networks, and learning

outcomes was influenced by my personal experiences as a current alumna member of an NPC

organization. While this potential for bias has often been cited as a weakness in case study work,

the in-depth observations generated by case studies can reveal more about the studied

phenomena than previously expected (Flyvberg, 2006).

Pilot Study

Before conducting interviews with NPC peer educators, I administered a pilot survey to

sorority women enrolled in a credit-bearing Recruitment Counselor[2] training class in Spring

2015. I was the co-instructor for the course as part of the practicum requirements for my

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[2] Recruitment Counselors are NPC sorority women who voluntarily disaffiliate from their organizations for a period of time, typically a few months, in order to assist Potential New Members during formal recruitment. At Southeast University, they are required to take a leadership course preparing them for their role.

master's program. These women were representatives from each NPC sorority at Southeast

University and had been selected to assist Potential New Members[3] through the formal sorority

recruitment process in Fall 2015. I asked them to complete an online survey to collect

information on their perceptions of peer education in NPC sororities and positions within their

sororities that matched the definition I developed. The results were used to help focus the topic

of this study and learn more about how women in NPC sororities at the focus institution perceive

peer educators. The survey also helped identify potential participants for the study. The survey

was a self-developed protocol and was not tested for validity or clarity before administration (see

Appendix B for a copy of the survey). I collected no identifying information, with the exception

of chapter affiliation.

Document Analysis

   Generalized Officer Titles for Peer Educators. I began investigating the connections

between the characteristics of peer educators and sorority officer positions by reviewing each

website of the 13 NPC chapters at Southeast University. I reviewed their chapter officer rosters

and kept a tally of similar positions, labeling them with generalized titles. Not every chapter

website had a roster of all officers and most chapters only listed their executive boards or

equivalent leadership teams.

   Generalized Position Descriptions for Peer Educators. To learn more about the

position descriptions of these officers uncovered through the website review, I collected the

constitutions of the 13 NPC organizations at Southeast University using the university's student

organization management portal. I analyzed the sections detailing officer position descriptions

to discern which positions contained peer educator responsibilities. I then created generalized

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[3] Potential New Member is a nonaffiliated woman who is going through the formal recruitment
process to join an NPC organization.

job descriptions and added them to the list of generalized officer titles I identified from the website review (Appendix A). While this did not create an exhaustive list of all NPC organization peer educators, this analysis provided me with list of potential officer positions that carry out peer educator responsibilities at Southeast University that I used to screen potential participants.

Interviews

The interviews with the NPC peer educators lasted approximately 25-55 minutes and were recorded using a digital voice recorder. I interviewed seven peer educators from five NPC organizations at Southeast University. I then transcribed the interviews verbatim and provided the participants the opportunity to take part in "member checking," the process of allowing participants to review data for accuracy (Creswell, 2013). The purpose of the interviews was to explore the NPC peer educator experience, particularly their level of training, sources of support, and achieved learning outcomes based on their role.

The interview format was semi-structured to allow for maximum flexibility but retain consistency throughout the study (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Semi-structured interviews bridge the gap between "an open everyday conversation [and] a closed questionnaire" (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 27). This guide allows for the use of certain questions with only certain participants if further investigation of a particular experience is needed. Therefore, while all interview questions for this study were developed in advance, various probes were used with different participants to ensure an in-depth response. Some probes were included on the interview protocol to help prompt me during interviews, while others were generated in the moment to encourage the participants to further share their experiences. I also considered the

order of the questions, so as the interview progressed, the participants were able to provide more detailed descriptions of their experiences and opinions.

Sample protocol questions.

Questions during the interviews included what they wish they would have known when they took their position, challenges or successes in their position, and who supported them during their officer term. For example, "In your opinion, were you prepared to assume your position/role?" The peer educator learning outcomes given to participants for review as part of the interview were developed and assessed by the BACCHUS National Peer Educator Study (Wawrzynski et al., 2011). The full interview protocol and the list of learning outcomes is in Appendix C.

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Data Analysis

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Coding

Open, axial, and selective coding was utilized to analyze the data from the participants' interviews. Additionally, I employed the constant comparative method to facilitate the creation of codes across the seven interviews (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This method looks for comparisons and similarities both within the data set and with other data sets from the study. Then themes are generated from the constant comparison of the data. Because of this result, the method is most often used with grounded theory studies as it is best suited for the creation of theories (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). While this study did not aim to generate a theory, this type of coding fit the exploratory nature of the study.

I initially engaged in open coding, where I reviewed the data to begin to assign names to the themes and categories (Lichtman, 2013). For example, my initial review of the data revealed the participants' discussion of serving as resource for their sisters. Once I began my axial

coding, the process of relating the themes and categories identified through the open coding, prominent themes of listening and role modeling emerged from their discussion of serving as resources (Lichtman, 2013). This stage in the coding process allowed for the creation of comparisons and possible connections between the themes. Finally, I used selective coding to extract the richest quotes to illuminate those themes and create a narrative (Lichtman, 2013). This step also caused me to make choices on the importance of each theme and what should be included in the findings.

Trustworthiness

I employed several methods to establish the trustworthiness of this study and its findings. First, member checking was used to allow participants the opportunity to review the interview transcripts and clarify their statements (Creswell, 2013). This reduced possible transcription and researcher interpretation errors. I also participated in peer review, the process of reviewing and questioning the research with a partner, to discuss emerging trends in the data and help me recognize potential bias or gaps in my interpretation of the data (Creswell, 2013). I also used intercoder reliability, the practice of agreeing on codes between independent coders (Cho, 2008), with a group of first-year students enrolled in a research methods course in a student affairs master's program. Their independent data analysis of four of the seven interviews resulted in similar codes and findings that emerged from my analysis. Additionally, in an effort to reduce any bias during the analysis and thematic development, I utilized reflexive journaling practices throughout the study (Creswell, 2013). Reflexive journaling is the process of engaging in critical reflection on my biases, assumptions, and relationship to the research. This helped me recognize and process my personal relationship with the research and its effect on my interpretation of the study's findings.

Institutional Review Board

The study followed ethical guidelines for research, including formal review and approval by the institutional review board. Pseudonyms for the focus institution, chapter affiliations, and participant names were used to ensure correct ethical practice. To protect the identities of the participants and their organizations, any names and distinguishing phrases or terms were removed from the transcripts. Additionally, the computer where the interview recordings and transcripts were stored is password protected and the signed informed consents were kept in a locked filing cabinet.

Limitations and Delimitations

Limitations included the size and scope of the study, as it was limited to a single university containing only 13 of the 26 NPC member organizations. Additionally, larger or smaller chapters at other institutions may have more or fewer peer educators than the chapters represented in this study. While generalization is not the goal of qualitative research, these limitations may make it difficult to generalize this study beyond Southeast University.

An additional limitation was that each sorority within NPC has different officer structures, thus each organization functions differently. This makes it difficult to establish representativeness within the sample. However, asking participants to describe their position's primary responsibilities, in addition to giving their official titles, minimized this limitation. This study was also cross-sectional by nature as it only explored the experiences of one cohort of peer educators at one point in time. The study was therefore a snapshot of this group's experience with officer training, support networks, and learning outcomes. Finally, despite the constructivist paradigm guiding this study, my role as the sole instrument used to analyze the data could create unintentional bias.

The most obvious delimitation in this study was the exclusion of National Pan-Hellenic Council, the Interfraternity Council, and multicultural Greek-letter fraternities and sororities. This was due to the small size of these organizations at the focus institution, differences in each groups' chapter structures, and a personal desire to focus on NPC groups. Future research may want to expand to these groups to create a richer understanding of peer educators in fraternal organizations.

Additionally, it is important to note that focus groups were considered as a method of data collection. However, due to the sometimes-competitive relationship between different NPC sororities, and women in general, this method was not included in the study (Hamilton & Armstrong, 2009). Focus groups might have caused participants to skew their responses in order to not "lose face" in front of representatives from other chapters.

Positionality

My interest in this study stemmed from my membership and experiences as a former officer within a NPC sorority. During my collegiate experience, I served in multiple officer positions that contained peer educator responsibilities. While these roles were a formative experience for me, I often felt unsupported by my international organization and my institution's on-campus fraternity and sorority life office. I had little to no training for my roles, one of which included creating educational programs for the chapter and judicial functions, and I was frequently left to interpret policies or expectations on my own. The impetus for this study was directly connected to the lack of training and support I believe I experienced as an NPC peer educator. Additionally, at the time of this study, I served as a collegiate chapter adviser for my sorority, but not at the focus institution as there was no chartered chapter present. Due to this role and my status as a student affairs graduate student, I hoped this study would help me better

understand how to support this population of student leaders in the future. While these experiences gave me personal knowledge of sorority chapter, campus fraternity and sorority life offices, and inter/national office operations, in addition to access to the Panhellenic community at the focus institution, I recognize the bias that may be present because of my relationship to the research topic.

Summary

This study sought to address the gap in the literature on NPC sorority peer educators. A multiple case study methodology was used to examine the experiences of NPC peer educators at Southeast University, focusing specifically on their overall experience and the training support, and learning outcomes they may have gained due to their roles. The use of a case study framework allowed the participants' unique experiences to contribute to the creation of general themes and trends (Flyvbjerg, 2006; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Participants in this study were NPC sorority women who held peer educator officer positions in the 13 chapters at the Southeast University. The purpose of the semi-structured interviews was to gather data on the peer educators' opinions of their position, the amount of training and support received, and the skills or competencies developed (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Analysis of the data was conducted using open, axial, and selective coding. This combination of coding allowed me to construct meaning from the data using themes and categories and their resulting connections (Lichtman, 2013). To establish trustworthiness, I conducted member checks and engaged in peer review, intercoder reliability, and reflexive journaling (Cho, 2008; Creswell, 2013). These methods helped with awareness of my bias and relationship to the topic of study, in addition to assisting me in addressing gaps in my research methods.

Chapter 4: Findings

Several themes emerged from the analysis of the participant interviews: 1) serving as a resource for sisters; 2) varied training experiences and preparation levels; and 3) the importance of peer support networks.

Serving as a Resource for Sisters

The NPC peer educators frequently described or stated the importance of being a resource for their sisters. This theme was especially notable when analyzing their interpretations of the skills and competencies they gained due to their position. As Carrie, a junior in Zeta Beta Zeta in her second term as the scholarship chair, asserted when discussing providing resources for the women on academic probation, "We're just always very sure and very intentional in telling them that we're there for them." She described the study resources she introduced to the chapter such as StudyBlue, an online study platform, and using her chapter's existing account with GINsystem, a data management application used by many fraternal organizations, to catalog the courses and professors that sisters had taken for future sisters to reference. Vanessa, a senior in Gamma Psi Alpha who served as the vice president of facility operations, remarked on how the competency, "feeling responsible to help improve the chapter community" related to her experience of "having that executive position, you need to make changes and improve whatever the situation may be." In this case, her chapter house's catering service was not meeting their needs, and, thanks to a summer internship, she was able to secure a new company that has improved relations between the chapter and the chefs. The proud tone in Vanessa's voice as she recounted this made it easy to see she was especially proud of this accomplishment. Additionally, Vanessa mentioned that she contributed significant time to her role because, "if anyone had questions or concerns, they would normally go to me regarding the house." This

became an even more important part of her role as her chapter hired three house directors during

her term. Mary Kate, a Theta Pi Gamma senior who served both as a new member educator and a

continuing chapter education officer, saw her positivity as a resource for her new members,

> Sometimes I just needed to be personal with them because I felt a disconnect or
>
> maybe they were having a bad week. And I like to cheer them up and make them
>
> ready, because we have [new member meeting] on Mondays, so I was like, "Let's get
>
> ready for the week! Yay!" And nobody likes Mondays, so it was just one of those
>
> things where I hoped that they took something out of being with me.

As Mary Kate described these interactions with her new members, it was obvious from her

inflection and excited hand gestures that she cared immensely for these women's success not just

in her chapter, but in the university as well.

All three of the new member educators spoke to their increased ability to "talk with a

sister about a risky behavior or choice," another example of a peer educator skill and

competency. When explaining her development of this skill, Taylor, another Theta Pi Gamma

senior who served as the chapter's new member educator, commented:

> . . . its not easy to talk to someone about a risky behavior or choice, just cause, I
>
> mean, sometimes we all make bad decisions and you don't do it intentionally, but I
>
> feel like it was important to talk in a way that wasn't looking down upon another
>
> sister and it was like helping them understand what to do differently.

Taylor mentioned having to use this skill when talking to her new members "about their

behaviors at fraternity parties and stuff like that." Despondent as she reflected on those

memories, she mentioned this was a low point in her experience as new member educator

because she felt like the "bad guy" instead of their "friend."   Olivia, a former new member

educator for Zeta Beta Zeta, discussed this skill, but in relation to helping her new members focus on their academics. When dealing with one new member in particular who was not going to class or studying, Olivia said, "If I saw her on campus, we would talk about going to class and have conversations. And it every time I was in the library, I'd start texting her and . . . then [she] would come over and study with me." Mary Kate also touched on this skill but in relation to conflict with a sophomore chapter member. When an older sister neglected the new member she was supposed to spend time with, she met with the sister to discuss what happened. When the sister did not see what she had done wrong:

> I was like, "Well, what if somebody did that to you? How would that make you feel?"
>
> . . . And I think that really put it in perspective. I had to learn how to have that
>
> conversation and not necessarily make her feel bad, but make her understand.

In their roles as new member educators, all three participants learned to confront their peers about their behavior and help them learn to make better choices

Additionally, many of the participants discussed problem solving in relation to serving as a resource for their sisters. Stephanie, a senior in Mu Gamma Sigma who served as the chapter treasurer, remarked on how her role helped sisters figure out how best to handle their unique dues situation. When reflecting on the support component of the definition of a peer educator, she proudly stated, "I really fought headquarters a lot to give [sister] payment plans because headquarters doesn't really like to grant them." She often convinced her organization's headquarters to grant payment plans to those sisters who could not pay their dues in full. With an excited start, she also told me of a new resource she created to present financial information to her chapter:

I realized that there's a lot of confusion with the numbers so . . . I made this

PowerPoint and it was so intense with details but it literally had everything. And it

helped . . . reduce the number of questions . . . So its hopefully going to reduce stress

on future treasurers too.

Olivia also alluded to using problem solving in order to help her new members bond and have a

good experience. Shyly, she confided "I get maternal and so if a girl wasn't getting to know

other girls as well, I would kinda worry about it and then try to organically- its hard, there's no

way to organically make some one have friends, you know." So to help girls connect with her

and each other, she would "on any given day, . . . be in Starbucks in the student union with three

of [the new members]" and during meetings she would put "them together in groups and [to run]

around and . . . have conversations and [engage] with each other." So through both the official

new member meetings and outside engagements, Olivia tried to make sure every new member

felt connected.

Within the theme of serving as a resource for sisters, two sub-themes emerged: 1)

listening; and 2) role modeling. Stephanie observed how vital it was to her role to listen to her

sisters or their parents so she could best meet their needs. After discussing how she helped

sisters understand their dues payments, she reflected, "I really had to realize not every situation

is the same. They may have similar components, but not every single solution or every single

problem is going to be the same." When discussing what her successor would need to know to

be successful, Vanessa eagerly shared, "Be open and a good communicator, cause the whole

point to having this job is to listen and be a liaison between the chapter members and the chefs,

and the house mom, and headquarters." For her it was central to her role in facility operations to

"listen and make the best decisions as a result." Olivia shared an experience where she was able to be there for one of her new members whose parents were divorcing:

> I passed her on the way to class or something and she was talking to her dad on the phone and I sat down next to her to say, "Hey," and then she was having a really hard time and broke down a little bit in tears on the bench in-between classes and . . . she told me "I wouldn't do this with any of my other friends.

Obviously still touched by revelation from her new member months later, it became clear that Olivia made it a priority to authentically engage with every new member. Because of this dedication, she was able support this particular new member in the moment when she needed a sympathetic, listening ear the most.

The participants often alluded or directly spoke to seeing their position as being a role model for other sisters. Nora, a former chapter treasurer from Delta Nu, saw this as the most important aspect of her leadership position. She responded, "The little treasurer roles of handling the money, that was minor in comparison to the unspoken responsibility of, 'Ok, there are 200 girls that are looking up to me.'" For Nora, being a role model was tied closely to the peer educator competency, "Ability to hold yourself accountable for obligations and commitments." She expressed her executive board's and her own commitment to "holding yourself accountable . . . to the very end of our exec term was like, 'I cannot slack, I cannot be negative, I cannot complain.'" Each of these statements was accompanied by solid raps on the table, accenting their importance to being a role model for her chapter. Since these peer educators were aware that their sisters were looking to them to model the way, they often intentionally volunteered for events or sought to motivate others to follow their lead. Mary Kate smiled as she recollected occasionally proctoring her chapter's study hours. She wanted her new members to see her

"sitting at a desk, putting in my headphones, and like grinding out some work. And to know that you have to do this for the next three years, you know, this isn't just something you do a couple of times a year." As it can sometimes be difficult to balance school and joining a sorority, especially as a first-year student, Mary Kate recognized the importance of role modeling that balance. She also spoke about how this position "holds you to a higher standard" and she wanted to set a good example for her new members.

Serving as a resource was foundational to each of the participants fulfilling their responsibilities of their position as a peer educator. They recognized and acted upon this important function of their roles' purpose in a variety of ways.

Varied Training Experiences and Preparation Levels

Each participant was able to describe some type of training experience for their peer educator roles, but the amount and quality of their preparations were extremely varied. Vanessa shook her head sadly as she remembered her one hour transition meeting with her predecessor and she commented, "it should be a process that continues over a couple of weeks . . . it's hard to even remember everything after one meeting." In contrast to other participants, like Carrie and Mary Kate, who were able to go to a regional or state officer training sponsored by their inter/national headquarters. For Carrie, the most useful part of her district officer training was meeting with the other academic chairs because "they said things they were having problems with or things that went really well for them. So we were all able to feed off of other ideas to bring back to our own chapters."

As the result of previous experiences or the quality of their training, every participant entered their role with a different level of preparedness. Both, Nora and Stephanie were accounting majors and so managing the chapter's finances was not a great challenge. Although,

Stephanie mentioned that she wished there had been more training on creating the budget because she, "didn't feel like [she] was responsible enough or competent enough . . . to handle and allocate $140,000 to the right amounts. [She] was terrified, . . . 'What if I mess this up? This is a lot of money on the line'." Taylor felt a similar lack of preparation when planning her chapter's big/little reveal, laughing as she recounted, "I really didn't know what events I was supposed to plan and stuff like that. . . . I had no idea what to do so I just Pintrested it!" Event logistics was a challenge for Olivia too because during training "I didn't really get specifics on those sorts of things, I just got a general overview of what to do."

Past leadership positions sometimes helped prepare participants for their roles as peer educators. After serving as new member educator, Mary Kate took on a smaller role as continuing chapter education chair. When asked if she felt prepared to take on this role she exclaimed, "Oh my gosh, yes! I felt like, especially coming from new member educator, I knew my stuff and I didn't feel like anybody would ever challenge me on it." Stephanie had to serve as assistant treasurer for a year before being elected to serve as the chapter treasurer. However, she had mixed feelings about this experience, recalling:

My treasurer was a [recruitment counselor] and so I assumed the position basically very early cause she's not allowed to handle stuff over the summer for the most part. So after only a semester of really just shadowing her and not doing anything, I got thrown into everything . . . I really had to learn a lot of it on my own, but I think that's ok, I guess, cause you kinda have to sink or swim.

A role that was supposed to prepare her for this challenging position did not end up serving its purpose due to a lack of responsibility on the part of the past treasurer and unfortunately, causing Stephanie even more stress. Taylor, with a sigh and an eye roll, disclosed that her previous

position as fraternity/sorority relations did not prepare her to serve as new member educator because "being a peer educator was just completely different than participating at philanthropy events."

Mary Kate discussed how personality could affect a person's level of preparedness for a peer educator position. She was uneasy as she discussed why she was unsure her successor was the best fit for the job, saying:

It's a really important position and it takes a special person to take it because it's not just reading a manual, you're directing a symphony. You've gotta have that movement in motion and you gotta know all the pieces and how they move and what makes them move and different things like that.

To Mary Kate, it was very important that the peer educator have a relationship with the new members and that it involved more than just running their new member meetings. Olivia mentioned a similar concern that past new member educators did not "have as strong relationship with the girls or they don't spend as much time getting to know them, like they would say, "I don't even know all the freshmen's' names."" This was problematic for her, evident from the incredulous tone in her voice, because she believed you had to truly commit your time to the position in order to do the job well. Flexibility was a trait that Carrie believed was important for her successor to have as "sometimes the day that you have completely blocked off to have their [academic probation] meetings, like five of them can't even show up or people are sick."

Two of the participants assumed their positions a few months into the officer terms due to the previous person being relieved of their position. Both Carrie and Taylor spoke to how this caused some confusion at the start of their terms and forced them to learn along the way. In

describing how challenging this situation was, Taylor explained, "I never got officer training . . . Was just like, 'Alright, here you go and here's these girls. What are you going to do?" While Carrie summarized by throwing her hands up and saying she took the "bull by the horns and winged it!" The usual manner in which these participants obtained their positions resulting in them failing to benefit from potentially helpful officer training.

Mary Kate was alone in discussing how she felt her organization's state-wide officer training was not sufficient for her needs as the new member educator at a large, public school, shrugging, "its one of those things where whenever you're the big fish in the little pond, its not helpful." She felt it was more beneficial for the smaller schools "because some of them needed more . . .and a lot of times I would just help the advisors." In addition, she felt like she already learned what was covered at the training by utilizing resources placed on her organization's website.

These varied training experiences often led to the participants' mixed feelings on their level of preparedness. Overall, when training was mentioned it was perceived as useful, but some crucial component to truly prepare them for their roles was often missing.

Importance of Peer Support Networks

When asked about the level of support they received or asked to discuss who supported them in their positions, every participant mentioned their peers in some way. Whether it was their friends or fellow executive board members, each woman was emphatic that their peers were there to support them. Often these were the first support networks mentioned and perceived as most important to their success.

Taylor was adamant about the support she felt as part of the executive board, "We all had differing ideas, but we all supported each other very well . . . we always said that we would back

each other up and I saw that throughout." When commenting on her executive board, Nora touched on a common thread, "I was very appreciative of . . . support amongst ourselves, like us 10 girls, we were like, 'Ok nobody else understands what we're going through.'" Vanessa felt that serving on the executive board helped her grow as a leader:

> I was able to sit in those executive meetings and learn more about different aspects
> of our chapter which was really cool to hear more about our chapter and even though
> I had one position that focused on one thing, I was still involved with everything
> else.

However, these support networks often crumbled at the end of their terms as the group became worn out from the burden of leading the chapter. In Stephanie's chapter, younger members were not stepping up to take leadership positions, so she recounted with a grimace the effect running for another term had on as, "By the end of that last semester on exec, we were very tense towards each other because [we were] so completely over it." As Nora explained her experience towards the end of her term:

> It really got hard to stay positive and be present and you notice all the bad things. . . .
> And I think that was really hard, the second semester, when all you hear is negative,
> you don't hear any positive. You have to swallow it and like just going up there and
> keep a positive attitude.

Despite these challenges, these peer support networks could be a positive source of encouragement. Throughout a stressful week, Stephanie happily stated "My favorite thing is Oreo milkshakes and I had people just bringing Oreo milkshakes randomly, which was really nice." Olivia discussed how thankful she was for her friends who "would help [her] with logistic things, like staying up and putting together bags" for bid day. Additionally, Olivia discussed the

support she received from the vice president she reported to, saying "She kinda did the same thing I did where she put more effort than is usually put in. So we were a tag-team with the new girls which was really nice." Taylor had a group of assistants that "were always there grading the quizzes and helping [her] teach." More often than not, the participants had positive things to say about their peer support networks and found that group dynamic crucial to their success in their position.

While a majority of participants also mentioned advisors as a source of support, their explanations of that form of support were often not as descriptive as when they discussed their peers. For example, when asked about support from advisors, Mary Kate responded, "I felt like it was checking in and then sometimes it was support depending on if I had to make a call on something . . . I would ask her opinion." Also, some would mention how their advisors did not always support them in the way they would have liked. Nora briefly mentioned that "it depended on who the advisor was" in regards to the quality of support. In Olivia's cause, she felt pressured to pander to a particular new member because mother and aunt were influential alumnae, and her advisors "needed to make sure this girl did well in the chapter." Visibly uncomfortable while recounting this interaction with her advisors, she quickly moved on to discuss better forms of support she encountered. However, a few participants did mention how believe their advisors cared about them and that they were very helpful when they had questions or concerns. As Carrie enthusiastically said, "I text her all the time and I'm just asking her random questions or having a bad day . . . they're just always there."

Support from peers was the main support system for these NPC peer educators as their peers best understood their experience. Advisors were also mentioned as a source of support by many of the participants, but the advisor role seemed limited in scope.

Summary

Three prominent findings emerged from this study: 1) serving as a resource for sisters; 2) varied training experiences and preparation levels; and 3) the importance of peer support networks. From providing academic resources to serving as an encourager, participants committed considerable time and effort to their perceived role as a resource for their chapters. Listening served as a foundational skill in a majority of the stories and experiences the participants disclosed surrounding their role as a resource. Participants also felt as though their roles as peer educators made them role models for the chapter. In regards to their training experiences, each participant received differing levels and quality of training. Previously holding a position was no guarantee for success in their roles, and almost every participant desired training that gave descriptive details concerning their major tasks.   Support networks were an important part of all the participants' experiences as NPC peer educators, but support from peers was especially important to their success. Their peers either on the sorority executive boards or simply their friends, helped them cope with the burden of leadership.

Chapter 5: Discussion/Implications

The study's findings helped expand the understanding of the peer educators' experience in NPC sororities by revealing the purpose they perceive as integral to their roles within the chapters and by illuminating how they are trained and supported in their roles. However, it also reinforced the lack of understanding surrounding these women's experiences due to the variety of diverse experiences and responses gathered during the study. The participants were certain of their role as a resource for their chapters. Especially by listening to the needs of their sisters and serving as role models, the participants felt they contributed significantly to both the chapter's and individual sister's success. Each participant received some form of training that helped prepare them for their role. But the wide variety of training experiences left some participants feeling unprepared to truly be successful peer educators. Finally, these women revealed that they rely heavily on support from their peers. These support networks, especially those that included executive boards, were tested throughout their officer term and sometimes resulted in the straining of these relationships.

Peer Educator Identity

The study revealed these women identify as peer educators, even when their position was not one I initially identified as a peer educator, such as treasurer. Through my analysis of their stories and self-evaluations of the skills and competencies (See Appendix D), I found each participant spoke to developing key characteristics found in a peer educator role. For example, Taylor, Olivia, and Mary Kate learned to speak with new members about potential risky behaviors or choices, which directly connects to creating interventions or helping other students examine and change their behavior (Ender, 1984; Sloane & Zimmer, 1993). Stephanie frequently described helping students problem-solve through her role as treasurer by helping

them navigate their dues payments and learning financial responsibility (Sloane & Zimmer, 1993). Nora spoke adamantly about the importance of being a good role model for her chapter (Sloane & Zimmer, 1993). Additionally, many of the participants strongly associated with the first three descriptors in this study's peer educator definition, "guidance, leadership, and support," and discussed how their roles fulfill those responsibilities. Stephanie summarized her feelings when she responded, "[They are] definitely the three main things that your do. Whether you realize you're leading them or not, its in your own actions or how you respond to something."

It is important to note even though the participants identified themselves as peer educators that does not mean their experience fully aligns with the definition of a peer educator. I believe this because many of them did not realize they were considered peer educators or that their positions held peer educator characteristics until I interviewed them. They saw themselves as role models or leaders, both important peer educator roles, but not the definition of a peer educator. My research indicates that these women were making efforts towards a peer educator identity, but there are still gaps in their practice. They have the ability and willingness to improve and better serve their chapters, but they need more formal, specialized training to meet that goal.

<div align="center">**Access to Training and Support**</div>

The findings also supported the assertion that only select members of fraternal organizations have access to officer training programs from their inter/national headquarters. A few participants discussed participating in headquarters' led training and two participants were unable to attend due to their appointment to the position a few months into the officer term. Additionally, the findings support the idea that women focus more on improvement of a group

and that they value support (Rosch et al., 2014; Testerman et al., 1994). Several participants

mentioned wanting to improve the chapter was a deciding factor in taking their position. Passion

for her sorority is what motivated Nora to run for election saying, "Being able to give back and

be a leader and just know that I contributed in some way to bettering our chapter was really

awesome and special." Also support from their peers was an important aspect of their

experience and crucial to their success as a peer educator. Taylor spoke enthusiastically about

her experience on the executive board, commenting, "My [executive board] was very close. . . I

really liked being in a supportive [executive board]." For Olivia, the support she received from

the vice president who oversaw her "was the most helpful" as they had similar goals of

revitalizing their positions.

Development of Values and Career Goals

The participants' experiences as peer educators in NPC sororities were consistent with

Dennet and Anzar's (2011) and Puchkoff and Font-Padron's (1990) findings that peer educators

gain valuable skills, such as solidifying their values and developing job-related skills. In regards

to values, Stephanie remarked, "I think when you're questioned a lot, it makes you really

evaluate what really are your values and what you think is true." Due to the difficult

conversations she had as treasurer, she became surer of her values and what she was unwilling to

compromise. Olivia found her position helped her develop the competency, "understanding

people's values are different from my own." With her new members she realized "there's girls

who have different personalities . . . like if a girl didn't care as much about school as I did, but

she was doing her best" and that it was her role to be there for them in whatever capacity they

needed her. Stephanie's role as treasurer also helped her realize that she "did not want to do that,

do accounting for the rest of my life" but learned she enjoyed helping her sisters and

communicating with parents and her headquarters. Serving as new member educator helped

Mary Kate confirm her desire to be a teacher. When discussing leading her chapter's new

members through their education period, she remarked, "It made me know, 'Ok, you are going to

be a teacher and you are going to be fine.'" For the participants, serving in these peer educator

roles not only helped them learn more about their values in relation to others, but they also

developed skills that will assist them in their careers as a result.

Implications

This study addressed a gap in the literature concerning not only peer educators in

fraternal organizations, but leadership training and development for this population, especially

NPC sororities. By learning more about peer educators' experiences in NPC sororities,

practitioner-educators can begin the work to provide these student leaders with more support and

training. It is noticeable from the findings that these women gained valuable skills and

experiences are as a result of their peer educator role, but more can be done to support their

development.

The most prevalent implication of this study was the need for better, more thorough

training to better prepare NPC sorority peer educators for their roles. Even the participants who

were satisfied with the training they received alluded to gaps that a more comprehensive and

rigorous training could address. Both Taylor and Olivia mentioned a need for training covering

event planning and logistics as these were responsibilities they were unprepared to fulfill. There

are numerous avenues, through which NPC sorority peer educators could receive this training,

including: in-chapter trainings, programs from on-campus fraternity and sorority life staff,

regional/district conferences or national programs sponsored by organization headquarters, or

NPC. Participants often discussed trying to improve the training experience for their successor.

Almost every participant mentioned that she attempted to provide more thorough transition materials for their successor in an attempt to remedy the lack of information they may have received.

There were two unexpected implications revealed within the findings. First, these women may be confusing a peer educator with being a good role model. As Sloane and Zimmer (1993) discussed, role modeling is just one part of being a successful peer educator. The best example from this study was Nora, who talked almost exclusively about her experience through a "role model" framework. This suggests that peer educators in NPC sororities need training that helps them better understand the role of peer education. Second, no participant mentioned the on-campus fraternity and sorority life or student life staff as a potential resource or source of training and support. Peers, advisors, inter/national headquarters staff, and parents were all discussed in these capacities by the participants, but student affairs practitioners were noticeably absent. Both are important implications for practitioner-educators working in fraternity and sorority life. Perhaps this omission is the result of a lack of knowledge on these resources or maybe the peer educators are wary to approach staff members for support. No matter the cause, it indicates a need for programming/educational initiatives to connect NPC peer educators with on-campus resources.

Campus-based fraternity and sorority life offices, inter/national organizations, and NPC should begin reevaluating their student leader training curriculums and support frameworks, especially if the role of peer educators in these organizations is to be better utilized. It might be beneficial for these trainings to focus on Leadership Identity Development (LID) theory to help sorority officers move towards a relational style of leadership (Komives et al., 2006). Additionally, these trainings should be easier for general members or non-executive board

officers to access. Not every participant was able to attend a training sponsored by their

inter/national organization, but the ones that did usually cited it as an important learning

experience. Finally, for peer education to have a more positive effect on NPC sorority member

development, specific training resources must be made available to address their unique concerns

and responsibilities as peer educators. These officers are not just tasked with administrative

responsibilities; they are suppose to assist their organization and its members in reaching the

ideals established in its mission statement, values, and ritual. Peer educators have the potential

to change the sorority experience for every woman in their chapter but to do so; they need proper

training and support.

Limitations/Future Research

My role as the study's primary instrument and data analyzer creates a limitation due to

potential bias I may have brought into the study. How I interpreted my participants' experiences

was influenced by my experiences as a peer educator and student affairs professional. The

sample size of seven peer educators was small in comparison to the approximately 2,400 women

who are members of the Southeast University NPC community. Additionally, only five of the 13

Southeast University NPC chapters are represented in the study. These limitations make the

study's findings relevant to the focus institution only. Another limitation is the retrospective

nature of the study. All participants, except one who was serving a second term in the position,

had finished their peer educator experience the fall semester before the study was conducted.

This was a purposeful choice as it allowed participants to reflect on their entire experience, but it

also may have influenced what they shared and how they shared it.

Future research on this topic should include a greater number of participants and/or

expand to multiple research sites. The research methods could be adapted to include a mixed

methodology to help aid in the generalization of findings. This could also take the form of a needs-based study to understand more fully what training, support, or additional resources NPC sorority peer educators (or those from other councils) need to be successful. Additionally, if participants were interviewed throughout their officer term or asked to complete a pre-, mid-, and post-experience survey, researchers may learn more about their holistic experience. Future studies could also investigate leadership development for sorority members by incorporating aspects of the LID theory (Komives et al., 2006). This study only focused on peer educators in formal officer roles, yet aspects of peer education can be found in the informal relationships sorority membership fosters, such as big and little sister relationships. Future research could expand to include the big and little sister relationship or focus solely on exploring how this informal relationship serves as a form of peer education. These studies would help better inform inter/national organizations and student affairs practitioners on how sorority women view leadership and how that might change based on officer positions and/or experiences.

Future studies should include Interfraternity Council, National Pan-Hellenic Council, and Multicultural Greek organizations to fully understand the peer educator experience in all collegiate fraternal organizations. Finally, NPC and the other councils have the opportunity to create a research-based peer education model for fraternal organizations that can be used by both member organizations and campus fraternity and sorority life offices. Inter/national headquarters could also take on the creation of a model that fits their organization's mission and values. A well-designed model could affect the fraternal experience for the next generation of fraternity men and sorority women.

Conclusion

Peer education has a vital role in helping NPC sororities fulfill their missions to create better women and future leaders. They provide invaluable services for their peers, which enhance the college experience, yet little is know about their experiences as peer educators. This study sought to highlight sorority peer educators' training, support, and skills and competencies development. Through in-depth interviews with seven women, the study found that peer educators perceive their role as a resource for their sisters, they experience various levels of training and preparation for their roles, and peer support networks are important to their success. By exploring the NPC sorority peer educator experience, this study provides a launching point for further research on this population of student leaders and their work. Understanding their needs allows for the creation of services and support that can enhance not only the experience of NPC sorority peer educators, but could enhance the experience of every woman in their chapters.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Comparison of Peer Educator Characteristics and Sorority Officer Responsibilities

Characteristics of Peer Educators	Generalized Sorority Officers Responsibilities
• Is an undergraduate student (Ganser & Kennedy, 2012; Winston & Ender, 1988) • Provides guidance (Ender & Newton, 2000; Gould & Lomax, 1993) • Provides leadership (Ender & Newton, 2000; Ganser & Kennedy, 2012) • Provides support (Ender & Newton, 2000; Ganser & Kennedy, 2012; Gould & Lomax, 1993) • Assists in the success of students at the institution (Ganser & Kennedy, 2012; Winston & Ender, 1988; Gould & Lomax, 1993) • Is a good role model (Sloane & Zimmer, 1993) • Helps other students problem-solve (Sloane & Zimmer, 1993) • Creates interventions or helps other students examine and change their behavior (Ender, 1984; Sloane & Zimmer, 1993)	• President • Oversees the executive board • Delegates and assists when needed • Provides general leadership to the chapter • Serves as a role model for the chapter • Standards/Ethics • Conducts programs on behavioral and ethical standards • Assigns sanctions or interventions based on member actions • Sometimes oversees a department • Risk Management/Reduction • Conducts programs on risk management or reduction practices • Creates interventions or offers support based on chapter or member behavior • Sometimes oversees a department • Academic/Intellectual Development or Scholarship • Assists and supports members who do not meet the academic requirement • Provides the chapter with academic programs and resources • Sometimes oversees a department • Chapter/Membership Development or Education • Conducts enriching educational or social programs for the entire chapter • Sometimes oversees a department • New Member Education • Oversees the new member education process • Supports new members as they transition into the chapter • Serves as a role model to new members

	• Sometimes oversees a department
	
	• Ritual/Fraternity Appreciation
	   • Oversees the ceremonies of the chapter
	   • Creates programs based on organizational values
	   • Sometimes oversees a department
	
	• House Manager/Facility Operations
	   • Provides programs and support for women living in the chapter house

Appendix B

Recruitment Counselor Pilot Survey

This was administered using Google Forms

1. What year classification are you?
   a. Freshman
   b. Sophomore
   c. Junior
   d. Senior
2. What chapter are you a member of?
   a. Alpha Chi Omega
   b. Alpha Delta Pi
   c. Alpha Omicron Pi
   d. Chi Omega
   e. Delta Delta Delta
   f. Delta Gamma
   g. Delta Zeta
   h. Kappa Delta
   i. Kappa Kappa Gamma
   j. Phi Mu
   k. Pi Beta Phi
   l. Sigma Kappa
   m. Zeta Tau Alpha
   n.
3. What year did you join your chapter?
   a. Freshman
   b. Sophomore
   c. Junior
4. What do you think a "peer educator" is?
   a. Free response

At this point, I shared with them the definition of a peer educator I had created from the literature

5. In the context of sororities, do you think Kelsey's definition of a peer educator is missing anything?
   a. Free response
6. Based on Kelsey's definition, do you think your sorority has a "peer educator" officer position?
   a. Yes
   b. No
7. If you answered yes to the previous question, please list the official titles of those officer(s).
   a. Free response
8. Do you think peer educators are important to sororities' values/mission/purpose?
   a. Free response

Appendix C

Interview Protocol

Date:_____ Time:_____ Location:_____

Participant:_____

Informed Consent signed?:_____

Introduction:
Thank you for your willingness to participate in this study. I believe this discussion will be valuable to the study and contribute to better understanding the experiences of students in similar roles.

Your responses will be confidential, though quotes from our time together may be used in the study. If this occurs, you and your affiliation will be given a pseudonym. Additionally, I will send you the themes I find in this interview and certain statements I think may be pertinent for you to review and clarify your statements if necessary.

This interview should not take more than 1 hour and to assist with note taking, it will be recorded.

1. What is the title of the position you currently hold (or held last year) in your sorority?

2. Tell me more about this position.
    Probes:
        • What are the job responsibilities of your position?
        • What role does your position serve within the sorority?
        • Is this an executive board/leadership team position?

3. What interested you to this position?

4. What is it like to be in this position?
    Probes:
        • If I shadowed you in this position, what would I see you doing?
        • Have there been high or low points for you in this position?

5. Describe a success you experienced in your position.

6. Describe a challenge you experienced in your position.

7. In your opinion, were you prepared to assume your position/role?
    Probe:

- Did you understand the expectations of the position?

8. Did you receive any training for your position? (unless answered in question #7)

<u>IF YES</u>: 9. What is your opinion on the level of training you received for your position?
   Probes:
Where did you receive this training?
When did you receive this training?
Who facilitated the training?
What did the training cover?
Is there anything else you would like to share about the training program?

<u>IF NO</u>: 9. What training would you have liked to receive for your position?
   Probes:
- What training would have helped you be successful in this position?

10. What do you think of the level of support you received in your position?
   Probes:
- Who supported you?
- What did they do to support you?
  - Ask the participant to provide specific examples
- (If they feel they weren't supported) How would you have liked to been supported?

11. I am going to give you a list of skills and competencies. Spend a minute or so reviewing them. Which do you think you have developed because of your position? You need only discuss one or two that are most salient to you. (See "Skills and Competencies" handout on next page)

12. What would the next person to hold this position need to know to be successful?

13. Based on this definition: "A peer educator is defined as a student who provides guidance, leadership, and support to other students through a variety of means such as academic advising, orientation, residence life, counseling (both personal and career), and health education in order to assist in the success of students at the institution," in your opinion, is your position considered a peer educator?
   Probe:
- Please explain.

14. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience?

Skills and Competencies
Revised from the BACCHUS National Peer Educator Study
(Wawrzynski et al., 2011)

1. Develop an effective solution to a problem
2. Critically analyzing situations
3. Analyze the basic elements of an idea, experience, or theory
4. Combine and organize ideas, information, or experiences into new more complex interpretations
5. Evaluate information, arguments, or methods and assessing the conclusions
6. Apply theories/concepts to practical problems or in new situations
7. Apply previous experiences to inform new situations
8. Present an educational program with a partner
9. Talk with a sister about a risky behavior or choice
10. Respond to someone who "wants your advice about something serious"
11. Comfortable present programs to students who are a different race/ethnicity, religion, or sexual orientation
12. Effectively working with others who may share views different from my own
13. Effectively managing my conflicts with others
14. Effectively managing conflicts between others
15. Be a role model for healthy choices
16. Effectively demonstrate skills in leading a group
17. Ability to motivate others to accomplish goals
18. Share ideas and information effectively to others
19. Recognize and accept my strengths and deficiencies
20. Clarify beliefs and values
21. Understand people's values that are different from my own

22. Have a positive self-concept (self-confidence, self-esteem, independence, and determination)
23. Articulate values and beliefs as they relate to personal decisions
24. Have a better understanding of my own values
25. Research skills that allow me to seek out information about topics
26. Ability to re-evaluate previous assumptions
27. Formulate an innovative approach or solution to an issue or problem
28. Listen to and consider others' view points
29. Ability to hold yourself accountable for obligations and commitments
30. Knowledge about general student health issues
31. Knowledge about campus resources
32. Effectively present programs
33. Effectively organize my time
34. Effectively manage my academic commitments
35. Develop long-range goals
36. Have career direction
37. Have a sense of purpose
38. Engage in effective listening
39. Give feedback to improve the quality of one's work
40. Have conversations with students who are a different race/ethnicity, religion, or sexual orientation than me
41. Feel a part of the chapter community
42. Feel responsible for helping to improve the chapter community
43. Consider the welfare of others when making decisions
44. Articulate values and beliefs as they relate to personal decisions
45. Understand the role of your personal belief system in personal or group values and behaviors

Appendix D

Peer Educator Skills and Competencies discussed by Participants

Numbers correspond to their placement on the list of skills and competencies in the Interview

Protocol (Appendix C)

*- Identified by multiple participants

1. Develop an effective solution to a problem

7. Apply previous experiences to inform new situations

9. Talk with a sister about a risky behavior or choice*

12. Effectively working with others who may share views different from my own

14. Effectively managing conflicts between others

15. Be a role model for healthy choices

16. Effectively demonstrate skills in leading a group

17. Ability to motivate others to accomplish goals

19. Recognize and accept my strengths and deficiencies

21. Understand people's values that are different from my own

22. Have a positive self-concept (self-confidence, self-esteem, independence and determination)*

23. Articulate values and beliefs as they relate to personal decisions

26. Ability to re-evaluate previous assumptions

29. Ability to hold yourself accountable for obligations and commitments*

32. Effectively present programs

33. Effectively organize my time

35. Develop long-range goals

36. Have career direction*

38. Engage in effective listening*

39. Give feedback to improve the quality of one's work

41. Feel a part of the chapter community

42. Feel responsible for helping to improve the chapter community

43. Consider the welfare of other's when making decisions*

Vita

      Kelsey Elam-Geuting is from Wilmington, Delaware and is the only child of Jane Elam and John Geuting. She attended St. Mark's High School in Wilmington, DE. After graduation, she attended James Madison University in Harrisonburg, VA. With the intention of becoming a high school history teacher, Kelsey studied History with minors in Interdisciplinary Social Sciences and Pre-Professional Secondary Education. After her experience as a Leadership Counselor for the Make Your Mark on Madison leadership program, she realized her passion for developing student leaders and decided to pursue a career as a student affairs professional. After graduating with a Bachelor in Arts & Letters in May 2013, Kelsey continued at James Madison to complete her Master's in the Art of Teaching with a concentration in Secondary Education-Social Studies as part of the university's five-year masters program. She completed two student teaching placements with 8th grade Civics at Skyline Middle School in Harrisonburg, VA and 11th grade U.S. History at Wilson Memorial High School in Fishersville, VA. After graduation in May 2014, Kelsey moved to Knoxville, TN to enroll in the College Student Personnel master's program. Her graduate assistantship was in the Center for Student Engagement, where she served as the advisor to the Issues Committee and the Women's Coordinating Council. Kelsey graduated with a Master's of Science degree in May 2016.