

Chapter 28

Service and Philanthropy as College Student Activism for Fraternity and Sorority Members

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ABSTRACT

College student activism is often thought of as a problem to be dealt with, focusing on the potentially damaging role that student protest can take on a campus. Activism, however, can be defined in a multitude of ways, including how students express themselves in their commitment to others. This notion of community service or service learning has taken on a major role on many college campuses, and can highlight the powerful and positive impact of student activism. This chapter explores the role of service and philanthropy as mechanisms for college students to express their beliefs and commitments to others. Specifically exploring those student behaviors in fraternities and sororities, activism among undergraduates can be a tremendous asset to an institution, to a community, and ultimately, to the students themselves.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter will address methods of student activism of fraternity and sorority college students through service and philanthropic initiatives. Direct methods include participation in social, political and educational related movements. These can include, but are not be limited to, participation in rallies, advocacy initiatives and the drafting of positional statements. Indirect methods include participation in service activities and active fundraising to support special causes.

College student engagement in service initiatives in the United States contributes greatly in a number of areas. A 2015 report of the Corporation for National and Community Service reported: “25.7% of college student volunteer, [this includes] 3 million volunteers, [totaling] 286 million hours of service [and] \$6.7 billion of service contributed” (Corporation for National and Community Service, 2015, para. 1). We also know that many members of fraternities and sororities have been found to volunteer at higher rates than their none affiliated college student peers (Hayek, Carina, O-Dey, & Kuh, 2002).

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College students, particularly those who belong to fraternities and sororities, might also later give more of their time to service and philanthropic initiatives beyond graduation. The Bureau of Labor Statistics reported, “individuals with higher levels of education were more likely to volunteer than those with less education. Among persons 25 and over, 38.8 percent of college graduates with a bachelor’s degree and higher volunteered, compared with 26.5 percent of persons with some college” (2015, para. 7).

In order to check the alignment of fraternity and sorority member engagement in service and philanthropic initiatives with what is occurring outside of higher education and more broadly in the United States, a review of classifications for charities was conducted. Identified were those organizations that many college fraternities and sororities are affiliated with or are in alignment with. More specifically, Charity Navigator (an organization that classifies charities along categories and causes) identified the following main categories “animals; arts, culture, humanities; community development; education; environment; health; human and civil rights; human services; international; research and policy; [and] religion” (2018, para. 1). Fraternities and sororities are working primarily with causes, as outlined by Charity Navigator, in community development, education, health, human and civil rights, human services and international. Some may still be working with causes in other areas (i.e. religiously based fraternities and sororities working on related initiatives), although these are less common and very situational based on the individual fraternity and sorority chapter.

In this chapter, the focus is on service and philanthropy as a lived, process of student activism, limited to the National Panhellenic Conference (NPC, 2018), historically White sororities; National Interfraternity Conference (NIC, 2018), historically White fraternities; the National Pan-Hellenic Association (NPHC, 2018), historically Black organizations; the National Association of Latin Fraternal Organizations (NALFO, 2018), historically Latin organizations; the National Multicultural Greek Council (NMGC, 2018), historically Multicultural organizations; and the National Asian Pacific Islander Desi American Panhellenic Association (NAPA, 2018), historically Asian/Pacific Islander organizations.

A review of fraternity and sorority chapters that are a part of the national/international umbrella organizations identified above was conducted in the preparation of the chapter. Twelve major areas of service and philanthropic initiatives emerged across these organizations. These included: children, education, medical, women’s issues, military and veteran’s issues, equity issues, global issues, mentoring, voter registration and civic engagement, empowerment, forms of abuse, and multicultural issues.

A variety of themes play a significant role in these groups when comparing each organization. Themes included, but are not limited to, medical, military and veterans, and global issues (for historically White fraternities), children and youth, education, medical and women’s issues (for historically White sororities), education, youth programs, mentoring programs, and voter registration and civic engagement (for historically Black fraternities), education, medical, voter registration and civic engagement, and empowerment (for Latino fraternities), forms of abuse (child, domestic, sexual), medical, and multicultural awareness (in historically multicultural fraternities), and medical, violence against women and children, and civic engagement (in historically Asian Pacific Islander Desi American fraternities or organizations).

Within each organization, there was identified a commitment to serve a different philanthropy or non-profit. This is where the idea of engaged activism initiatives is displayed to show how each group individualizes itself in order to help various communities and give ‘back’ to others. Previous research has found that members of fraternities and sororities participate in higher levels of community service than their non-affiliated college student counterparts (Hayek, Carina, O-Dye, & Kuh, 2002). There are higher levels because each organization is typically involved in a specific service related activity during the school year, which is why many non-members may not have as much community service engagement.

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