Fraternal Organization Members’ Self-perceived Leadership Growth

Colleges and universities have invested significant resources into formalized leadership development programs and organized leadership organizations for students. Research has confirmed that students can and do increase their leadership skills during their college years (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). It has also been found that the increases in leadership skills can be attributed to, at least in part, to the collegiate experience (Astin, 2003). Although extensive research exists about the experiences of individuals who hold or have held leadership positions, minimal information exists about the effectiveness of specific types of organizational experiences. Likewise, minimal information exists about actual growth in leadership skill from the time a student begins his/her college experience until he/she becomes a senior.

Student membership in traditional college and university student organizations such as student government, fraternities, or sororities, purportedly build leadership skills over the course of a student’s participation. These opportunities help students develop friendships, negotiate conflicts, and participate in group projects or other kinds of living/learning activities (Astin & Astin, 2000). However, Astin and Astin stressed that “leadership involves considerably more than holding some kind of formal student office, earning academic honors, or being a star athlete. Rather, leadership occurs when people become concerned about something and work to engage others in bringing about positive change” (p. 23). Based on this premise, the purpose of this study is to assess self-perceived leadership skill development among Texas A&M University students who were members in traditional fraternities or sororities during the 2009-2010 academic year.