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 the 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 there is extensive research about the experiences of individuals who hold or have held leadership positions, there is minimal information about the effectiveness of specific types of organizational experiences in which they participate. 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 information, 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.

Approximately 4,200 undergraduate students at Texas A&M University were members of one of 54 fraternities or sororities during the 2009-2010 academic year. By measuring current leadership skills and levels specific to their perception of leadership growth since high school we may determine a connection to their organization affiliation and leadership development. Significant relationships between the variables of interest may assist student affairs administrators and leadership development specialists in revising their membership education programs to better meet their stated goals and objectives.

A descriptive design (Field, 2000), using a modified Borich Model for Needs Assessment (Borich, 1980) and the Socially Responsible Leadership Scale (SRLS-R2), will be used to achieve the purpose of this study. The population (\(N = 4,200\)) of interest includes all Texas A&M University undergraduates who were members of a fraternity or sorority during the 2009-2010 academic year. A proportional stratified random sample (\(n = 360\)) ensures that all students from the population of interest have an equal and independent chance of being selected for this study. Proportional stratified random sampling techniques ensure that each subgroup will be representative of the population of interest (Ary, Jacobs, & Razavieh, 1996).

The SRLS-R2 measures self-perception of leadership according to the eight constructs of the Socially Responsible Leadership model (Ricketts, Bruce, & Ewing, 2008). This model and proposed instrument allows for the (1) identification of a baseline of each population’s leadership aptitude, (2) identification of trends in leadership skill development specific to respondents’ perceptions of leadership growth since high school, (3) determination of significant differences in leadership growth between organization types, and (4) determination of significant differences in leadership growth between majors, races, and classifications. Individual skill rating scales (1= Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Agree, 4 = Strongly Agree) will be
summed to determine overall perceptions of leadership skills across the eight SRLS-R2 constructs (consciousness of self, congruence, commitment, common purpose, collaboration, controversy with civility, citizenship and change). In addition, respondents will be asked to record their academic major, classification, and high school graduation year.

The summed portion of the proposed electronic assessment instrument is considered statistically reliable and valid scales that measure critical values identified in the Social Change Model of Leadership (Higher Education Research Institute, 1996). This leadership model is being used because it was designed for college students and advocates for leadership development grounded in social responsibility and change for the common good (Higher Education Research Institute). The values and ideals captured in this leadership model are embraced by national fraternities and sororities. As such, they should be reflected theoretically in their overall membership and organization membership education programs (curricula).

Bibliography

