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A pilot program evaluation of the EDGE Program for new members of Sigma Phi Epsilon fraternity

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A Pilot Program Evaluation of the EDGE Program for new members of Sigma Phi
Epsilon Fraternity

by

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Epsilon Fraternity

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Dedication

This report is dedicated to the memory of my mentor, John Robson, Lawrence, '28, Editor of the *Sig Ep Journal* from 1941 to 1969. As pledge class president of Wisconsin Alpha, John had the sad duty to help the parents of one of his pledge brothers who died of alcohol poisoning gather up the young man's belongings from his room. On many occasions when I had the privilege of sharing dinner at John's home, he would seem to look into the distance, then state, "Young men need to be taught how to drink." I never knew the reason John said those words until after his death when his widow, Peggy, told me about the day he met his pledge brother's parents at the door of the chapter house.

Introduction

High Risk Alcohol Use Among College Fraternity Members

There is little evidence that current prevention programming directed toward undergraduate fraternity members is effective despite multiple attempts to manage, reduce, or eliminate the high risk use and abuse of alcohol among members of college fraternities, there (Walters, Bennett & Noto, 2000;). On campus programming using a social norms approach has been successful in reducing alcohol consumption to some degree, but one failure of such single campus programming is that members of sub-groups such as college fraternity members reject the normative information for a campus as a whole, believing that within their specific sub-group, alcohol consumption is at a different normative level (Carter & Kahnweiler, 2000). Targeted social norms group challenges have been demonstrated to have limited value in reducing high risk alcohol consumption (Neighbors, Lee, Lewis, Fossos, & Larimer, 2007). Social norms group challenges are not widely used on college campuses due to the time intensive nature of carrying out social norms group challenges within individual social sub-units such as residence hall floor units, individual chapters of college fraternities, and athletic teams (McNally & Palfai, 2003; Hunter & Mazurek, 2004). The ability of college level prevention programs to produce evidence of impact across all students may be limited by the in-group messages students receive from their immediate peers (NIAAA, 2002).

Perhaps single campus prevention efforts for individual social units can be reinforced by prevention programming supported across campuses, such as within the chapters of a national or international college fraternity. In fulfilling a duty to care towards members, whether holistically, or more specifically in terms of academic

achievement, personal development, or on legal bases, fraternal organizations face both a challenge and an opportunity (Bickel & Lake, 1999; Powell & Wechsler, 2003; Walton, S., 1996; Wechsler, Molnar, Davenport, & Baer, 1999). Cross-campus prevention efforts by fraternal organizations also have the effect of supporting the educational mission of each individual campus, since the level of student learning has been associated with the level of alcohol consumption (Caudill, Crosse, Campbell, Howard, Luckey, & Blane, 2006; Singleton, 2007).

The present pilot program evaluation report was focused on one such cross-campus effort to reduce high risk drinking among members of the 260 plus chapters of Sigma Phi Epsilon Fraternity in the context of a program focusing on behavior that emphasizes healthy choices in a positive masculine environment (Carr, 2007). The program, EDGE, was designed specifically for new members within their first year of membership, that group of men within the fraternity which is at highest risk of negative alcohol use consequences (Wechsler, et al., 2002; Presley, 2002).

EDGE: Context of Program Development

In 1999 the Fraternity convened a National Substance Abuse Task Force to consider what might be done to reduce the risk management issues surrounding high risk alcohol abuse by undergraduate members. Among those alumni volunteers sitting on the task force were Judge Mitch Crane, Craig Templeton, Chuck White, Britt Dunaway, Paul Chabot, Bill Davenport, and John Hartman. All members were part of the Headquarters staff or were active alumni volunteers within the fraternity. Crane (personal interview, November 29, 2007) stated that he interjected two points in the discussion.

Alcohol abuse was mainly an issue among new members, and two, Sigma Phi Epsilon had a great training program in place for chapter officers [Carlson Leadership Academy], but nothing in place for new members. Therefore, [Sig Ep] needed to address alcohol abuse among new members.

As a result committee members determined to create a new program focused on prevention specifically designed for men in their first year of membership in the fraternity. The committee recognized that any alcohol prevention programming could not be couched in a negative “Don’t Drink” manner. The programming would have to be directed in positive terms and include opportunities for group activities, physical activities, individual reflection on what it means to be a member of the fraternity, and periodic follow-up to reinforce any culture change resulting from the intervention.

If we were to develop a program specifically around alcohol abuse, no one would listen to it. Undergraduates have already heard enough prior to college, at orientation, and on campus about alcohol use and abuse. We agreed that any program we would develop should deal with structure, history, Ritual, etc., rather than substance abuse and lack of accountability. We wanted to introduce undergraduates to parts of the organization that made Sigma Phi Epsilon special to them (Crane, personal interview, November 29, 2007).

The first such programs for new members were held in 2001, called “Building Brand ‘U’”. They were held away from campus at YMCA Camps or local religious retreats. Within in a short time, the program name was changed to “New Member Camp”. When Ryan Blanck, current Director of Health and Wellness at Sigma Phi Epsilon Headquarters, assumed responsibility for the new member program in 2004, the program

name was changed to EDGE, and was well established as an integral part of the Sigma Phi Epsilon Leadership Continuum described later in this report.

EDGE: The First Stage of the Leadership Continuum

Faced by challenges associated with both issues of alcohol and substance abuse and affirming the developmental nature of fraternal organizations, Sigma Phi Epsilon Fraternity developed and implemented a series of program and policy changes (BMP Evaluation Report, 1994). These changes challenged the traditional pledging process, replacing it with a four year continuous development program designed to impact an individual the day he joins through the day he graduates and beyond. To supplement this new developmentally focused organizational structure, professional and volunteer leaders fashioned a continuum of leadership programs. EDGE is the first such program that a new member of the fraternity encounters.

As a first-year member program, EDGE was developed to change fraternity culture among new members with nationally identified core messages and intended student learning outcomes. EDGE is an overnight / 24 hour regional seminar experience with follow-up contacts that is designed to provide members with the tools to develop healthy – physical and mental – life habits. Issues addressed include social acceptance, alcohol, drugs, prioritization, goal setting, leadership skills, and best practices for balancing academic and social life (Sigma Phi Epsilon Educational Foundation, 2008).

The health and development activities reinforced via EDGE are delivered by interactive presentations led by a fitness / wellness professional. Other issues are introduced in small group discussions dealing with values clarification, personal goal setting, use of the CHOICES alcohol skills education program (Marlatt & Parks, 2009),

and encouraging personal leadership. A keynote speaker on making healthy decisions dealing with alcohol and drug use is the featured presenter at each EDGE camp. Along with the interactive discussions and reflective activities, attendees experience ropes courses, physical challenges, and activities based on camaraderie. The program involves a faculty of senior undergraduate leaders, trained alumni volunteers, and guest speakers on topics such as motivation, leadership, and expectations for a healthy fraternity experience (Sigma Phi Epsilon Educational Foundation, 2008). All EDGE events are held at handicapped-accessible rural retreat sites, such as YMCA Camps, away from campus distractions.

Student learning outcomes of the EDGE program include the following.

- Decreased alcohol consumption and problematic behavior of new members.
- Increased engagement and achievement in academic programs of study.
- Increased individual health of new members in physical, mental and emotional realms.
- Increased leadership skills congruent with the core values of the Sigma Phi Epsilon Fraternity.

EDGE was conducted each year from September until May at 30 regional sites across the United States in 2007-2008. The program is introduced to new, first year members as the initial stage of SigEp's Leadership Continuum. The Leadership Continuum was developed in 2002 to help SigEp move closer to its mission, *Building Balanced Leaders for the World's Communities*, by providing regional, national, and international programming. The five levels of the Leadership Continuum focus on *arête*, Greek for "excellence in every part of life" (Minnis, 2007, p. 6). The five levels include

(1) EDGE for new members within a year of joining the fraternity, (2) The Carlson Leadership Academies for current and future chapter officer training programs, (3) The Grand Chapter Conclave, a biannual legislative and educational meeting of more than 1,400 SigEps and friends, (4) the Ruck Leadership Institute, an annual summer four-day program for 160 of SigEp's most accomplished undergraduate leaders focused on personal leadership and the Balanced Man Ideal of Sound Mind and Sound Body held on the campus of The College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, Virginia, and (5) the Tragos Quest to Greece, during which a cohort of sixteen undergraduates travel on an 11-day visit to Greece with SigEp alumni mentors and a renowned professor of philosophy and Greek antiquities to study the origins of western thought and civilization. Each year, the entire Leadership Continuum reaches more than 4,000 undergraduate SigEps. In 2006-2007, EDGE reached 2,480 new members within a semester of joining the fraternity out of 5,900 total new members, for an immediate saturation of 42 percent. Core components of the EDGE program include the following major elements (Sigma Phi Epsilon Educational Foundation, 2008).

EDGE Core Components

Values Clarification – Specific activities comprising the EDGE experience include a one-hour values clarification discussion / reelection (SigEp Values) co-facilitated by a current undergraduate leader and an experienced alumni volunteer. The life principles of Virtue, Diligence, and Brotherly Love, with the pursuit of Sound Mind and Sound Body in a Balanced Life are introduced in a small group setting, and new members are challenged and encouraged to reflect on what these values mean in their personal lives. The immediate objective of the session is to introduce new members to the Oath of

Obligation they will take as a part of the fraternity initiation Rites of Passage contained in the Fraternity's Ritual Guide. Through this small group activity, SigEp leaders hope to develop in new members a strong allegiance to the larger, national organization – it is believed that an affinity to the local campus-based learning community (chapter) will develop due to the nature of the group living-learning experience.

Leadership Continuum -- The half-hour session on the SigEp Leadership Continuum led by an experienced undergraduate leader together with a trained alumni volunteer introduces the five elements of the Leadership Continuum described above using a video clip. The media materials are a corporate introduction to the possibilities for involvement, leadership training, and cultural enrichment designed to engage new members in the educational services offered through the Fraternity as a complement to their on-campus academic education. The immediate goal of the session is to make new members aware of the range of developmental / educational experiences offered through the Fraternity such that new members are motivated to go beyond mere membership to leadership. The Ruck Leadership Institute and the Tragos Quest to Greece would seem particularly noteworthy listed on applications for major graduate scholarships.

The Leadership Challenge – The Leadership Challenge session, also led by an alumni volunteer supported by a top undergraduate leader, is designed to enable new members to explore what their current leadership style is based on their prior leadership experiences, and more specifically, to help new members articulate ways in which they can develop additional leadership strengths. The participants take the Kouzes and Posner (1999) Student Leadership Practices Inventory as a part of the session. Results are interpreted by the session facilitators, and discussion is centered on how personal

leadership skills can be strengthened through participation in the Fraternity at the local and national levels. Emphasis is also placed on the ways in which new members can contribute their leadership talents to other campus organizations.

Personal Strategic Planning – The hour session on life direction facilitated by an experienced alumni volunteer and a highly respected undergraduate leader lifts up the importance of step-by-step planning to arrive at major life goals such as graduate school attendance, a professional career, or other goals selected by new member participants. The immediate objective is to introduce the value of step-by-step planning as an important personal value. New members specify their personal goals and are led through an exercise designed to assist them in identifying the specific steps needed to attain those goals, including the reinforcement of healthy personal habits such as setting alcohol consumption limits. New members leave the Personal Strategic Planning session with one copy of a hand-written pressure-sensitive three-page form (Tying It Together Follow-up Form) on which they have stated their personal goal(s) and have listed their personal markers to identify progress toward that goal. The form also provides space to identify personal opportunities as well as obstacles men must overcome on the way to successful goal attainment. Facilitators make specific mention during the Personal Strategic Planning session of common obstacles to attaining goals with particular emphasis on healthy life habits, in particular, managing procrastination and setting expectations for personal alcohol use in university life (Bandura, 1997). The Tying It Together Follow-up Form is later used as a major part of the EDGE reinforcement process, during which one of the pressure sensitive hand-written forms is sent back to the new member after a

period of weeks, reminding him of the goals he set, and asking whether he is “on progress” toward the attainment of those goals.

CHOICES and Group-based BASICS – A special version of the brief alcohol education program, CHOICES, modified with photos and illustrations based on Sigma Phi Epsilon themes, is distributed to new members during the CHOICES session (Marlatt & Parks, 2007). Again, led by a volunteer alumnus and a recognized undergraduate leader, new members read through their personal copy of the CHOICES booklet and write their own responses to questions dealing with alcohol / other drug use and its personal consequences to them in the booklet. As *SigEp Choices About Alcohol* states, “The safest option is not to drink. By law, it is your only option if you are under 21” (p. 2). Alcohol skills training is one program that has shown efficacy with fraternal organizations in reducing high risk consumption (Caudill, et al, 2007; D’Amico & Fromme, 2000; Kivlahan, Marlatt, Fromme, Coppel, & Williams, 1990). No judgments are made nor implied toward participants’ personal choices; the emphasis is on creating an open dialogue among the new members on the relative costs / consequences of the choices they elect to make. The focus on alcohol skills training, sharing personal stories, and recognition among the group of young men that many persons like themselves are confronting the same issues reinforces members’ awareness that many young men are confronting the same issues. Maintaining good alcohol choices within a safe environment using risk management procedures is the immediate objective of the CHOICES session.

Before the CHOICES booklets are distributed at the start of the CHOICES session, participants complete a pre-test based on the CHOICES brief alcohol education program. After the session, participants complete an immediate post-test.

Alcohol Risk and Responsibility – EDGE was originally framed around the nationally known campus lecturer, Judge Mitch Crane, whose presentation on alcohol risk and responsibility has been offered on literally hundreds of college campuses. Using his unique brand of humor, Judge Crane challenges the new members to be conscious of the decisions they make with regard to alcohol and other drug use, and learn to live their best life. In his presentation he draws on his experience as a municipal Judge whose duty was to handle many legal cases involving the over excessive use of alcohol. His keynote presentation is typically followed by the CHOICES small group session. Judge Crane was the Keynote speaker at the Frankfort EDGE.

Sound Mind / Sound Body – As an alternative draw to participate in EDGE, a nationally known professional exercise specialist attends as many EDGE events as his schedule permits. New members spend up to four hours as a group with Frank Butterfield, who educates them on healthy body skills / exercises that will benefit their life-long physical and mental health, and promote the ideal of the SigEp Balanced Man. New members practice stretching and conditioning exercises that will benefit them athletically, and selected participants will be asked to “volunteer” with the Mr. Butterfield to demonstrate specific conditioning issues to the entire group. In this atmosphere affirming healthy masculinity, the wellness lessons reinforcing the relationship between a sound mind and a sound body are introduced to the group, specifically, messages about alcohol, other drug, and tobacco use. The substance prevention message is delivered in such a syndemic manner focusing on “positive behavior” (Carr, 2007, p. 3) that participants do not realize at the moment what is occurring. Participants are encouraged to take the stretching and conditioning exercises

back to share with other members of their local learning community (chapter) on a daily basis as a means of facilitating the adoption of healthy personal habits. Mr. Butterfield did not participate in the 2007 Frankfort EDGE.

Outdoor Recreation – As a part of the healthy mind / healthy body experience, new members spend at least two hours on a supervised ropes course, a wall climbing facility, or other physically challenging large motor / team building activities. In a rural retreat focusing on group work, physical activity and team building to promote cross chapter camaraderie, as well as group bonding with an individual chapter's new member participants, is an important immediate outcome of the EDGE weekend.

Participant Evaluation – Immediately following the intensive EDGE retreat and before participants leave for their local campus, all participants complete a reflective evaluation of the 24 hour / two day experience (EDGE Program Evaluation). New members are asked to specify their reactions to each program session, to the physical activities, and the benefit to them of the overall EDGE experience. New members are then contacted six times within the first six months after the EDGE retreat to reinforce personal behavior change (Anderson, Hamilton, & Abdella, 1995a; Anderson, Hamilton, & Abdella, 1995b). All follow-up communications include messages associated with core desired student learning outcomes. These messages reinforce program goals associated with alcohol risk reduction, leadership development, personal health and well-being, and increased academic engagement and achievement. The specific intention of all follow-up contacts is to reinforce concepts introduced to new members during the EDGE retreat in order to reduce intervention decay (Caudill, et al., 2007).

- Two days after the program, new member participants are contacted by the Director of Health and Wellness. Men are encouraged to complete an on-line survey that asks participants to provide evidence of immediate learning outcomes as a result of their experience ..
- Thirty days post-EDGE weekend, new members are contacted by one of the small group facilitators or their own Chapter Counselor (alumni or faculty volunteer at the local level) by telephone or email.
- At 60 days post-EDGE, participants receive a message (email or multimedia) from their EDGE weekend's Keynote Speaker / Wellness professional.
- At 90 days, participants are mailed a copy of their Personal Strategic Plan and asked to give feedback on whether they have kept a course toward their stated goals.
- Finally, at the half-year mark (180 days), the Chairperson of the National Leadership Committee, or his liaison, sends an email to reinforce the earlier communications.

EDGE Faculty Post-Retreat Focus Group

EDGE faculty members participate in a post-retreat focus group after new members have left the site and immediately prior to their leaving the retreat facility. They are also asked to complete their own written assessment of the experience for use by Headquarters program planning staff to adjust future EDGE programming. Results are shared with the National Leadership Committee at regularly scheduled intervals.

EDGE Pilot Evaluation Design and Methods

From a total of five retreats in 2001-2002 with 475 new members attending to 30 retreats in 2007-2008 with 2,884 new members participating, the program has grown to include more than 42 percent of all new members who join Sigma Phi Epsilon. Crane stated that the original committee asked for a program evaluation to be carried out, but up to the present time “instead of a formal evaluation we counted total numbers of participants as a sign of success and had no [other] measures of effectiveness” (personal interview, November 29, 2007). While the increasing participation of new members in the EDGE retreats was encouraging, a formative evaluation focusing on immediate outcomes of the EDGE experience was needed to both justify program investment by stakeholders within the Fraternity and improve overall program impact.

In cooperation with Ryan Blanck, Brian Warren, Director of SigEp Residential Learning Communities, and Dr. Andrew F. Wall, Assistant Professor of Higher Education, University of Rochester, the PI submitted a grant proposal to do so to the Department of Education in April 2007 (Alcohol and Other Drug Prevention Models on College Campuses Grant Competition, 84.184N). The proposal was rejected for the particular grant competition because it did not deal with a successful demonstration project on a single campus. Additionally, a representative of the Office of Safe and Drug Free Schools, U. S. Department of Education, stated that the grant proposal did not include any empirical data that demonstrated a reduction in risky behavior, and that any grant proposal to be awarded must include promising empirical evidence of success (Deborah A. Price, personal communication, April 17, 2007). In July 2007, the Illinois Higher Education Center for Alcohol, Other Drugs and Violence Prevention, awarded the

PI a \$7,500 seed grant to focus on one EDGE retreat within the State of Illinois to carry out a Pilot Program Evaluation of the EDGE program. The objective of the pilot evaluation was to acquire some empirical evidence of substance abuse prevention effectiveness, and to perform a formative evaluation of the Illinois EDGE program as a means of improving overall program delivery. This paper is the formal report for the IHEC seed grant.

EDGE Pilot Program Evaluation Design

The October 2007 two day (Saturday / Sunday) EDGE held at Frankfort, Illinois was selected as the site for the pilot program evaluation due to its proximity to the PI. A detailed schedule of the Frankfort EDGE event is included in Appendix A. The EDGE Pilot Program Evaluation Design as planned included multiple data sources (Table 1). At the outset, the Pilot Program Evaluation was designed as a formative evaluation, that is, ultimate program objectives and long term student learning outcomes can not be determined by an evaluation that is itself completed within one-half year after the EDGE weekend. Only a longitudinal formal research program across several years' time could be expected to determine overall program worth. Limited measures of program effectiveness and immediate student learning outcomes can be assessed via the Pilot Program Evaluation that is the focus of the present evaluation activity. Such a formative evaluation focused on the process by which EDGE retreats are carried out also can alert program coordinators to critical issues in process fidelity that inform changes to improve the delivery of future programs.

A mixed method design was selected to respond to the political context of the formative evaluation where different stakeholders have varying information needs and

agendas for the evaluation (Teddie & Tashakkori, 2003). A mixed method approach allows this pilot program evaluation to flexibly address questions that can be examined, to build findings from one method to the other, and to engage in questions of data divergence. With limited resources of knowledge, time and money the rigor of the evaluation procedures is limited. One objective of the present project was collection of quantitative empirical data to demonstrate a reduction in risk behavior for purposes of further grant applications requiring preliminary evidence of risk reduction success. A second qualitative objective was to carefully “listen” to the voices of new member participants to ascertain the immediate student learning outcomes reflected in their reactions to the EDGE retreat weekend and its recall across a half-year. The “voices” of EDGE facilitators and new member participants may serve to expand the understanding of the empirical results, and provide a window on the actual versus ideal EDGE implementation process. An understanding of the actual implementation process can inform program stakeholders on ways to improve the overall fidelity of future programming to meet EDGE objectives. The immediate outcome objective of this seed grant is to make recommendations toward improving the quality and fidelity (Wall, White, & Rogers, in press) of EDGE retreat implementation in future years.

Table 1: EDGE Pilot Program Evaluation (Formative)

Question	Pre-Post Survey	Observation	Interview	Focus Group	Document Review
How is the EDGE Program implemented?	X	X	X	X	X
How is EDGE experienced by student members?	X	X	X	X	X
What impact does EDGE have on student alcohol and other drug use?	X	X	X	X	X
What impact does EDGE have on student academic and psychosocial achievement?	X	X	X	X	

Methodology

As noted in Table 1 each method in this pilot program evaluation was directly connected to evaluation questions. The purpose of the program evaluation was explained to all men present, and volunteers were solicited from the new members present to meet in a focus group with the PI at the conclusion of the Saturday evening bonfire. The purpose of all focus groups was to gather impressions, knowledge and beliefs about the experience of new members with EDGE. The PI also indicated that he would hold focus groups with EDGE participants at individual chapters later in the academic year. The PI indicated survey participants would be contacted via email for their personal reflections about their EDGE experience in ninety days, and to take an on-line post-EDGE follow-up

of the Survey of Alcohol-Related Attitudes and Behavior (Wall, A., Hazen, L., Trockel, M., & Markwell, B., 2008; Trockel, M., Wall, A., Williams, & Reis, J., 2008) to be administered in mid- March near the end of the 2007-2008 academic year (roughly 180 days post-EDGE).

The Survey of Alcohol Related Attitudes and Behavior was administered prior to the start of the Frankfort EDGE retreat on October 13, 2008, and re-administered on-line six months later for a period of 20 days from March 9 – April 1, 2008. Survey items examined prevalence of alcohol use, perception of peer alcohol use, negative consequences from alcohol use, student engagement in the fraternity, leadership activities, individual health and academic engagement.

The review of existing documents included gathering documents from the program and data that were currently gathered by the EDGE staff. Analysis of materials sought to synthesize documented EDGE program messages with student and staff-reported messages. Process indicators gathered by EDGE staff and Headquarters staff helped inform student experience with the program and aided the process of EDGE implementation.

Finally, the PI served as a participant observer at the Frankfort EDGE retreat in October 2007, where he led the SigEp Values sessions and one of the CHOICES sessions as a small group facilitator for Frankfort EDGE new member participants. Becky Markwell, Director of the Illinois Higher Education Center for Alcohol, Other Drugs and Violence Prevention, also served as an outside observer for the Saturday and Sunday events. As a means of comparison between EDGE retreats, the PI also served as a participant observer for the Coeur d'Alene, Idaho EDGE retreat on February 29-March 1,

2008. Idaho EDGE participants were also informed of the pilot evaluation project, and permission was obtained to administer the Survey of Alcohol-Related Attitudes and Behavior before the start of the retreat.

Analysis of data related to each data collection method was carried out within method first (Onwuegbuzaie & Teddie, 2003). Survey data were analyzed descriptively and inferentially. Interviews and focus group transcripts were coded for themes, as were document reviews. Mixing of results by method sought to identify emerging themes for each evaluation question. To check for authenticity, the PI asked selected undergraduate participants and EDGE facilitators to member-check the emerging themes from the qualitative analysis procedures to determine if, in their perception, the PI “got it.” In all cases, messages returned to the PI supported the analysis validity.

A timeline of the Frankfort EDGE Pilot Evaluation design is included in Appendix A. Focus group protocols for EDGE participants and faculty members are included in Appendix B.

Quantitative Results

The Survey of Alcohol Related Attitudes and Behavior (Wall, A., et al., 2008; Trockel, et al., 2008) was administered via paper and pencil to all Frankfort EDGE participants signing an Informed Consent document indicating their willingness to participate in the EDGE Pilot Program Evaluation at the start of the retreat on Saturday morning. Pre-EDGE survey data were also collected at the Coeur d’Alene, Idaho EDGE¹ retreat on February 29, 2008. A total of 164 usable surveys were completed for analysis

¹ Post-EDGE survey data will be collected on-line from Idaho EDGE participants in September 2008 at roughly the same time post-EDGE as for the Frankfort EDGE. The objective is to increase the number of matched pre-post surveys. The PI participated in the Idaho EDGE camp at the invitation of the Director of Health and Wellness to provide a second camp experience for program fidelity comparison purposes.

across both retreat sites (Table 2). Post-EDGE data from Frankfort participants were collected via an on-line form of the survey accessible from March 9 to April 1, 2008. The instrument responded to the four pilot evaluation questions (Table 1) through a pre and post survey focused on examining student behavior and attitudes associated with alcohol. The post survey was sent to all Frankfort EDGE participants from whom the evaluators had human subject approval to send a follow-up survey AND for whom the evaluators also had a valid e-mail address (n=76). The pre-survey was completed using paper and pencil, while all post-surveys were completed via an e-mail invitation and a web-based survey. Following data collection, all surveys were entered into SurveyMonkey, a web-based survey platform, then downloaded into excel data files. The pre and post excel files were cleaned, then transformed into SPSS version 11.0 for Mac. Once pre and post SPSS data files were created, then the two files were merged into one file using three variables including individual self reports of the first three letters of their mother's name, the first three letters of their month of birth, and the last four digits of their home phone numbers.

It is important to note the pre-post design of the quantitative portion of this study, where changes over time may be documented but attribution of change to the EDGE program is challenged by uncontrolled for external influences. A quasi or experimental design in the quantitative portion of the study would respond to this concern, but this is not possible given the scope and design of the present pilot evaluation study.

Data Analysis

Once data were downloaded, transformed into SPSS and merged into a single file, there were 245 variables in the merged pre and post survey dataset. Data analysis began

with descriptive analysis of the 164 pre, 31 post and 26 matched pair (pre and post) responses (See Table 3).

Table 2: Study Participation

	Pre-Survey	Post-Survey	Pre-Post Matched Surveys
Total Sample	164	76	76
Total Returned	164	31	26
Percentage Return	100%	40.7%	34.2%

The background of survey respondents indicated that most EDGE participants completing the survey were in their first year of college, their first year of fraternity membership and did not live in the chapter house (Table 3).

Table 3: Year in School, Chapter and House of Survey Responses

Variable	% Pre-Survey	% Post-Survey	% Pre-Post Matched Surveys
<i>Year in school</i>			
First Year	61.6%	61.3%	61.5%
Sophomore	20.7%	32.3%	34.6%
Junior	14.0%	6.5%	3.8%
Senior	3.7%	--	--
<i>Years in Chapter</i>			
First Year	80.0%	97.0%	100.0%
Second Year	10.0%	3.0%	--
Third Year	5.3%	--	--
Fourth Year	1.2%	--	--
<i>Live in Chapter House</i>			
First Year	30.5%	22.6%	26.9%
Second Year	5.5%	3.2%	--
Third Year	1.2%	--	--
Other	62.8%	74.2%	73.1%

Findings Related to Student Attitude and Behavior

Data analysis associated with the evaluation questions indicated limited support for EDGE program impact on alcohol related attitudes and behaviors. Using the most rigorous, but still limited test, considering only matched pair data (those for whom both pre and post responses were available), findings related to self-reported alcohol consumption per week revealed a promising trend from pre to post-survey. Individual consumption reported at the post survey was lower than at the pre survey across multiple measures of self-reported alcohol use (Table 4). Self-report of both typical drinks per week and drinks in the past week were lower at post-survey than at pre-survey by an average of 2.6 and 4.4 drinks respectively. Additionally, there was a .65 drink decrease in self-reported alcohol use the last time individuals consumed from pre to post. A particularly important finding to identify was that among the 26 matched pairs (matched responses from pre and post surveys) there was a decrease in self-reported alcohol use. This finding is important because it is positive trend evidence of EDGE program impact in accord with the stated immediate goal to moderate alcohol use among new members. While the findings do not reach the level of statistical significance, this could in fact be a limitation of the small sample size (i.e. 26 matched pairs) available for analysis. Moreover, due to the lack of a comparison group of new members NOT participating in EDGE for this pilot evaluation, the trend difference between pre and post may in fact represent a significant finding in light of the well-documented trend that alcohol use and related negative consequences rises throughout the first semester of the academic year (Wall, 2007). Given the limitations of the pilot evaluation design, limited response rate and known patterns of student alcohol use, the trend findings in this study represent

promising indirect evidence the EDGE “live your best life” program does impact new members.

A very important finding, and in fact a statistically significant finding, was that from pre to post there was a 4.38 drink decrease in the perception of typical peer chapter member alcohol use, a 24 percent drop in perceived peer alcohol use. This finding was significant at a $p = .019$ level, meaning this finding was due to chance in 19 times out of 1000. Correcting the mis-perception of alcohol use among peers toward each other is an important goal of the EDGE program and encouraging evidence that the EDGE program may be positively contributing to the social perceptions of new member participants (Trockel, Williams, & Reis, 2003).

Table 4: Pre and Post Self-Reported Consumption, Positive Group Expectations, and Negative Group Expectations

N = 26 (Matched Pairs Only)	Pre	Post	Statistical Significance
Typical Self-Reported Drinks Per Week	27.88	25.28	.307
Self-Reported Drinks Last Week	23.74	19.6	.345
Number of Drinks last time you consumed	11.23	10.58	.491
Average consumption in typical week	18.23	13.85	.019*
Positive Chapter Expectations Scale (6 items)	25.62	25.76	.828
Negative Alcohol Expectations Scale (6 items)	19.96	19.04	.482
Positive Alcohol Expectations Scale (4 items)	7.00	7.77	.189

Among other important measures of alcohol use and related consequences examined in the student survey were positive peer expectations, negative alcohol peer expectation and

positive peer expectations of alcohol use. The positive chapter expectations scale included questions such as making “a positive difference on campus through service” (item 16), abiding by “democratically derived chapter alcohol use standards” (item 17), and “have a good time together without alcohol” (item 20). In total six items were combined into the positive chapter expectations scale for pre and post examination.

Results indicated that there was a .14 higher scale score from pre to post. This finding is limited, but can be interpreted to indicate that at post-survey there was a slightly higher agreement with positive expectations for chapter life.

The negative alcohol expectations scale consisted of six items on which individuals reported that they perceived their peers to expect them to drink with them in different social situations. Items included getting “drunk with them on weekdays” (item 29), weekends (item 30) or at parties 27). The negative alcohol expectations scale trend was in the wrong direction, indicating at post-survey that matched pairs were less likely to disagree with their peers expecting them to consume with them. This finding was not statistically significant, nor was the finding associated with positive peer expectations of alcohol use. The positive peer expectations of alcohol scale had four items like my peers expect other members to drink responsibly or not at all (item 72), my peers expect me to “refrain from drinking heavily” (item 90), or expect me to “have fun with them whether or not alcohol is involved (item 31). The positive alcohol expectations scale trended toward decreased agreement with positive peer expectations of alcohol use. That is, at post-survey, responsible and moderate use of alcohol was not as “expected” as it was at pre-survey.

Positive and promising trend findings associated with perception of peer alcohol behavior, self-reported alcohol consumption and positive chapter expectations were important findings supporting EDGE program goals. However, findings associated with positive and negative peer expectations of alcohol use were less promising. Overall, the findings did suggest self-reported alcohol use decreased 2.6 drinks per week, a 9.3 percent reduction at post survey, one of the primary goals of the EDGE program.

Qualitative Results

Results of the Frankfort EDGE pilot program evaluation are presented below to systematically respond to the research questions listed in Table 1. The first research question was “How is the EDGE program implemented?” The following is a chronological description of events as they occurred at the Frankfort EDGE.

Chronology of the Frankfort EDGE

The two EDGE lead faculty members met with the Principal Investigator (PI) at the retreat on Friday evening prior to the start of EDGE on Saturday morning. The time line for the retreat activities was reviewed, with special attention paid to planning time for administration of the Informed Consent to participate in research, and administration of the *Survey of Alcohol-Related Attitudes and Behavior*. After dinner, other members of the EDGE faculty arrived in order to be present early on Saturday morning with all of the educational materials in place. A second general meeting was held to determine if faculty members understood their roles and responsibilities, and to go over specific points about presenting some of the educational materials early on Saturday morning. Due to the amount of educational material to be presented in a little more than 24 hours, presenters were rotated from room to room rather than asking new member participants to change

places. Moving the presenters rather than the participants would seem to take less time despite the proximity of the small group rooms to each other.

As EDGE participants arrived, facilitators learned that in several cases new members had participated in a full day of activities on their campus prior to leaving for the EDGE retreat. In fact, men from the more distant chapters represented at EDGE drove through the night to arrive in time for the 10:30 a.m. start of meetings. One group arrived nearer to 7:00 a.m., and asked where they might sleep for a while until the session started. Since the resident retreat staff did not have cabins quite ready at 7:00 a.m. on Saturday morning, the early arriving men were offered the faculty cabin for their nap.

As chapter delegations arrived from 8:30 a.m., groups were assigned cabins and asked to return to the main lodge at 10:00 a.m. to prepare for the opening event. The physical facilities in the Frankfort camp consisted of a central lodge building with a main hall on the first floor and meeting rooms in the floor below, a dining hall, and outlying cabins holding up to twelve persons. Restroom and shower facilities were in a separate building that also served as the locker room for the swimming pool during warmer months.

One chapter delegation was still not present at the 10:30 a.m. start time, and the decision was made to begin without them due to the necessity of administering the pilot evaluation pre-EDGE survey that required about twenty minute's time. The chapter arrived during the explanation of the Informed Consent document, and determined not to participate in the survey since they were "too tired to complete a survey after their long drive." One of the EDGE facilitators took the men from that chapter as well as other men who elected not to participate in the program evaluation to a room in the basement for a

discussion while the main group completed the survey. Due to the survey administration time, the entire day's sessions ran about a half-hour behind the posted schedule through dinnertime. Lunch was delayed until 12:30 p.m., and the Ropes Challenge Course was held from 1:00 p.m. to 3:15 p.m. Small group sessions two and three were held until roughly 5:45 p.m., when the break for dinner occurred.

The resident retreat director asked us to offer grace to our group, so I volunteered to sing Sigma Phi Epsilon's Grace: "Oh Lord, bless this food to our bodies, and Sigma Phi Epsilon to thy service, for ever more." The meal at dinner included rice, green beans, and what seemed to be boiled chicken breasts. Water, coffee, and cool aid punch was also available. The dining facility itself was in an older building with worn furnishings, and not very well lit in this observer's opinion.

The keynote speaker, Judge Mitch Crane, arrived around 6:30 p.m., just when dinner for the group was nearly over. The Keynote session seemed to go quite well from this observer's vantage, although it was apparent that the audience seemed smaller than it had been at the start of the day's sessions in the morning. Following the completion of Judge Crane's presentation, the men broke into groups to participate in the CHOICES program. The PI led one of those sessions observed by Becky Markwell, Director of the Illinois Higher Education Center for Alcohol, Other Drug, and Violence Prevention. Participants seemed to have a good response to the specially-designed CHOICES booklet with SigEp logos and photos. The group commented more about the table showing the time it took to sober up than any other part of the booklet. The men seemed comfortable with completing the pre- and post-CHOICES alcohol knowledge assessment.

After the CHOICES session the bonfire was held despite a few sprinkles of rain. Men told stories about how they came to join SigEp, their involvement in Sigma Phi Epsilon, and the impact that their fraternity experience had on them. As an older member of the fraternity (48 years), I shared a story about my own chapter as a “Singing Chapter,” then sang “The Sig Ep Pipe Song” as a means of ending the campfire, particularly because of the last words of the song, “until one by one they went away, to meet again tomorrow night!” Immediately after the bonfire, the PI / participant observer led a focus group of new member volunteers who reflected on their EDGE experiences up to that time. The other EDGE participants had free time for hoops and other recreation about an hour until the agreed-upon “lights out” bedtime. The EDGE director made clear to the new members that a lot was still planned for Sunday morning, and they should take every opportunity to get their rest.

Sunday morning sessions started on time without any apparent miscues. The last small group session was held, and a large Wrap-up session was held in the main lodge assembly hall. The EDGE retreat director asked questions about the purpose of EDGE, and rewarded men with SigEp materials, such as the recently published history of the fraternity (Eskes, 1999). Again, the PI slipped into his role as a senior volunteer and asked at the end of the Wrap-up session for all men present to form a circle, link arms, and sing the Fraternity Anthem. The entire EDGE retreat was completed by 11:00 a.m., and men were sent on their way back to their campus chapters. The EDGE faculty members held a focus group to debrief about their observations of the camp, their experiences with the teaching materials, and their reflections on the quality of interaction among the new member participants. The PI left the retreat just prior to noon.

EDGE Faculty Focus Group / Debriefing Themes

All Frankfort EDGE faculty members were experienced EDGE facilitators, and most had worked with each other during prior EDGE program presentations. After students left for their home campuses, the faculty members gathered in the main lodge hall to reflect on what they observed during the weekend. The PI recorded the debriefing session for later transcription. The “voices” of faculty members were not kept separated for reasons of anonymity. Following are themes that emerged in the ensuing conversation.

The EDGE “stigma”

A major concern of all EDGE facilitators and coordinating staff members was whether EDGE was viewed in a positive frame by new member participants. The “camp” setting of the physical site was one aspect of the concern, and the attitude that men acquired from older undergraduate members that EDGE was something that had to be “endured” was the other part of the issue, as Judge Crane mentioned above. In confirmation, a third facilitator who was also a Chapter Counselor reflected on his experience in a chapter that has sent men to EDGE since the first one in Illinois was held at the Illinois Alpha (University of Illinois-Champaign) chapter house.

I think chapter culture is an influence on the attitudes of new members. The chapter I volunteer at, and I side with you guys about the influences, the chapter I volunteer at is an example. From the beginning, the first year we sent people to EDGE, that was the one at the U of I, they came back and said, “It sucks”. So it started a culture of negativity about EDGE, with everyone saying, “Ya know, this thing stinks.” And they come away with a perception that EDGE is just a disaster.

I mean, it's a big culture change. I don't know how to change [the perception] – it's hard to check. I think the best way for us to check that is to improve [EDGE] as much as possible. The only thing is...we will not see the benefit of it [until] four years down the line.

A younger facilitator said,

Not all the members see it that way. 'It's boring, it sucks, it's a waste of a weekend, but, I see the benefit of it.' Which is why I'm here as a facilitator. I agree with you. We need to change the stigma a bit, bring more fun in, and within a few years hopefully [EDGE] will have a good name.

An undergraduate first-time facilitator elaborated about his chapter's history with EDGE.

A lot of the guys that went in 2004 had a very negative experience and those guys are still here, so there's a little bit of a stigma about [EDGE]. The people that have gone the past two years have had a very good response to it. I think we need to do a better job of clarifying what [EDGE] is and what's going to be expected during the weekend, and what kind of things they are going to be doing. Four years ago we had such a bad experience and it's still in the back of people's minds. It's very hard to change your mind without having them go to it again, so I think the stigma of [EDGE] will work itself out in time. Overall, [our chapter is] getting to the point where we realize there are positive aspects to [EDGE]. Some of it is boring to us, but, you know, it's our time to shine, I guess, [because we already know the material].

EDGE: The challenge of “time” and “intensity”

One concern resulting from the EDGE presenters’ observations of the 24-hour Frankfort EDGE was that insufficient time was available for new members to interact informally with men from other chapters. Now only was time needed for informal networking, but the intensity of the small group sessions was problematic for the facilitators.

One possible solution offered was to increase the size of small groups in order to reduce the number of small group sessions. As one leader reflected,

I think part of it was that [new members] wanted more of a night off. Even if it requires arriving earlier or if we can figure out some way to free up more of the night where they weren’t [in small group sessions], they could go out and meet more guys and do that on their own. It’s like one session after another after another, and that does wear the guys out.

The limited amount of time, the number of forms to be completed, and the intensity of the sessions weighed on the facilitators. “And especially, why force it [interaction / discussion in small groups], because it was forced today. Did anyone else feel force?”

Well, we’re all pulling teeth in most of these sessions unless some of you are remarkably better facilitators than I am. We’re asking people to make articulate statements about pretty sensitive issues, pretty ephemeral issues, such as values and attitudes. Many of these people haven’t developed the thinking skills yet to be able to identify values let alone to make detailed reflective statements about the values.

Disagreeing with the comment above, a Strategic Planning facilitator said that “Just to go on the flip side of what I just heard, people in my session wanted more time.”

Part of the intensity facilitators associated with the small group sessions had to do with the number of forms new member participants were asked to complete.

In all honesty, they don't like the Leadership Task Inventory where they fill out forms, because they filled out twenty forms this weekend. They hate doing those forms. That's all they do is complain. And in the Leadership session, it's the same thing as you [refers to another facilitator's earlier comment]. They just keep complaining every time you bring out those forms. “I don't like to write. I don't like to write.”

Not all facilitators agreed the forms were an issue.

Uh, I don't know, I think they really like them. They told me, when I asked them what they liked the best when I was doing it, I said, ya know, think about this the whole time and I'm gonna ask you what you want and what you didn't like at the end. They liked what they were doing and they liked what they learned

A second issue surrounding the 24-hour nature of the Frankfort EDGE program was the extended driving time required of men from distant chapters to arrive in time for the 10:30 a.m. Saturday morning start time. Several of the attending delegations drove as many as eight hours through the night to get to the EDGE retreat.

I think the other issue we need to address is [new members'] safety for getting here early. [I am particularly referring to one of the men who arrived after the start of the morning session yesterday] where he's telling me that they apologized for being so rude and crabby this weekend. They felt there was no way they could

have gotten here earlier because of the fact that they would have to pay another five hundred dollars to stay here the night prior to EDGE. So that's why they drove in one night. I probed a little deeper and said that, well, there was an option but somebody would have had to know how to reach the Illinois Alpha house in Champaign [three hour's driving time south of Frankfort, Illinois].

Another faculty member agreed that staying overnight at a chapter "would be a lot of fun for the guys."

Yeah, if people would make those connections ... [laughter]. I'm just saying if we [Headquarters staff members and / or EDGE retreat directors] know that someone's driving from this far away, we give them a hint that they're [welcome to use the Red Door privilege], but, uh, let's be honest, most of them are gonna drive overnight because its fun and they can sleep in the car and on the road trip. If we can figure out a way for them to stay over night in another chapter's house, if that's something that we need. It is on them, but I am not sure if we should allow them full expenses to get here.

The issue of having enough sleep and the driving distance involved was repeated for the return trip on Sunday.

I'm never far from thinking about what are the issues. And it does bother me that there are some people that drive the long distances with little or no sleep and, especially some of the people going back and one of the guys this morning told me in my group that he's got a seven hour drive, and I said, "Well, are you going to be able to sleep in the car?" and he said, "No, I have to drive." And I said, "Well, are there gonna be other people up in the car to make sure that you're

awake when you're driving those seven hours?" And he said, "No, I don't think so." I said, "Well, you better figure out some way to make sure someone's awake with you," because he didn't look like he was gonna be able to walk out of here, lot alone drive for seven hours. That, that bothers me.

Later another facilitator added the following.

That's dangerous. We keep – pushing two day weekends, the suggestions from my [small] group was that, either make the intensity or the time it takes a little bit less. Because I think we can fit the subject matter in less amount of time than we give them. So free time...or keep the intensity all throughout Saturday and then let Sunday just be a debrief session, almost of the sound body type – it gets some exercise in. They lost the point on the Sunday small group. They just don't care anymore at that point.

Individual chapter operational procedures

A third theme in the EDGE faculty member debriefing was that new members wanted to learn about how individual chapter operations were carried out on other campuses.

I noted in each session I facilitated that [EDGE new member participants] wanted to learn more about individual chapter operations stuff. And I think that during the [small group sessions] they're being asked very generic leadership questions. I started asking them about how can you apply that to your chapter's improvement, or something like that, and I got some good answers out of them. I think if we spread that out along the whole program that could really benefit the guys. If the

guy leading the sessions didn't ask a few questions about the fraternity, it's so, it's so generic.

In follow-up, one of the other faculty members suggested that the more specific questions asked at the beginning of a session meant "then they have to use very specific, what was that rational thinking that we were talking about before? They have to use that to do it [answer the questions]."

Yeah, I noticed some of the camp employees during the ropes course were asking some simple questions on how [the guys] could relate that experience to big things down at the fraternity or whatever, and [the guys] know what they'll do and they may not have even realized it.

The ropes course experience seemed particularly impactful to the faculty group.

I didn't participate in the obstacle course, but I was with my group when they did, and thought it was probably the best thing that happened this weekend. It was interesting to watch them, men in all chapters have to work together. I don't know if your groups did the thing with the two platforms and the two boards.

[Second person] And they had to get across? By helping and talking to each other? We were probably on that one for half an hour. And they, you know, constantly worked at it to try and figure out how to get across and bring everyone else across without losing touch with each other. I thought that was just phenomenal. I thought that was a great, great thing for them to experience.

Interestingly, the camp employees who were certified on the ropes course apparently were completely unfamiliar with SigEp and its programs. As one facilitator mentioned,

I made the assumption that [employees] here at EDGE retreat knew something about Sigma Phi Epsilon and therefore knew something about EDGE. The ropes facilitator that I was working with was absolutely fascinated as to what the group was, and what we were about. And we have been here [at the camp] for three years. They've never taken the step to look into what we're doing.

Mention of the camp employees brought to mind the presence of the outside observer, Becky Markwell, Director of the Illinois Higher Education Center for Alcohol, Other Drugs and Violence Prevention. One of the group asked the PI, "That lady that you brought, what were her perceptions? Did she have any preconceived notions that you knew of?"

I talked to her a little about that, and said, uh, what were you expecting coming in? And she had a conversation with her daughter about it, and was like, well, what are you doing this weekend? And she said, "I'm going to a fraternity gathering." Her daughter heard this and said, "Oh!" [laughter]. And that was the only assumption I took from her. I think she took it with an open mind because it, she's definitely a very, very intelligent person.

Another said, "She was telling us that she was very impressed by how organized we are in the Leadership Continuum."

She is nationally known in prevention programming, and is one of EIU's more successful grant recipients, with well over 11 ½ million dollars in grants over the last 15 years. She's very well positioned within the NIAAA (National Institute of

Alcoholism and Alcohol Abuse) so that people like Henry Wechsler from Harvard University, that produce a lot of reports on student alcohol use and abuse are Becky's colleagues. She also knows Peter Lake and Bob Bickel, who wrote *The Rights and Responsibilities of the Modern University*, a pro-fraternity legal issues book, and she sits on the board of the Association for Interdisciplinary Initiatives in Higher Education, which is one of Bob Bickel's babies.

She presented data on the CORE report for the State of Illinois to the Association of Fraternity Advisor's summer drive-in at Illinois Wesleyan University. And she will coordinate what called the CATS Conference (College Alcohol and Traffic Safety Conference) the first week of March next year (2008). It would be wonderful if we could find a way of having Sig Eps from each chapter in Illinois at that conference. And she pays for students to stay overnight because that's part of a grant from the Illinois Department of Transportation. She gets a lot of attention from them.

One of the EDGE facilitators wanted the group to know about an important change in Illinois law.

Illinois has changed, and you should let your undergraduates, especially the senior undergraduates know that there's a new law in effect. We for the longest time did not have a social host liability statute in this state. Which means that if somebody came to your house, and they got drunk and they went home and they crashed their car and they killed themselves or killed someone else, you weren't legally responsible for that. Now that has changed [shuffles through a set of papers he brought with him to EDGE].

Another facilitator asked, “What is social host responsibility? Does that stem from bars over serving or from parents providing alcohol?” The PI responded,

There’s a special law for bars, but there’s also a change in the law dealing with parents and homeowners serving underage. And the homeowners serving alcohol underage then, would include people who rent apartments – so, all of the off campus parties now have clearly different rules than they did have.

The first facilitator continued his explanation.

Of course, I don’t have the date, but I can tell you that somewhere within the last month, through the Chicago Law Board Review, two teenagers were seriously injured in a car crash after her driver drank beer at a party, settled the case with the remaining tenants this week for 1.8 million dollars. This settlement is the first of its kind resulting from the Illinois Drug or Alcohol Impaired Driver Responsibility Act. The law was passed in 2004 and it makes adults who let minors drink at their premises or elsewhere face civil liability if the minor subsequently kills or injures any other person. So anyone the these chapters who is over 21, who is serving people who are underage, if they leave and they get in an accident – [those over 21 who served the alcohol] are civilly liable on the book at this point.

The EDGE director followed up with a question of his own.

So now, let’s take an example of a fraternity party. There are officers and there are non-officers. And there are alumni board members, who are never supposed to be at parties but they still have some responsibility there. Who is liable? Every member of the house and the alumni board?

The facilitator, who was familiar with civil law, responded.

That's a good question. If I am the plaintiff's attorney, I am gonna name every single person in the chapter and everybody on the alumni board. Now, the alumni board should be insulated because they should be incorporated and that should insulate the alumni members from civil liability. The undergraduates don't have that option and it is, ya know, in all likelihood, the people who are not involved, the people who were not participants who are not going to be held liable. But the [chapter] officers are gonna be. And the people who served alcohol are gonna be.There is no way that if somebody died today, and I don't care what county you're in in the state, you are gonna get a verdict of less than four or five million dollars.This law makes it a slam dunk in, at this point, you are civilly responsible.

Following the description of the new Illinois law, one of the listeners offered that, "I think we got a new speaker. I like that approach. Using real life experiences, that's good."

The facilitators associated telling stories about real life experiences to their observations of the CHOICES small group session, during which several of the facilitators told their own personal stories about the negative consequences of alcohol. For example, one man had been in a bar fight and apparently had to have reconstructive surgery on his face. A man who was also a Chapter Counselor described his experience on the morning of Y2K.

On the morning of the millennium I was in a hospital room listening to a mother tell me that before my son joined a fraternity, he didn't drink, because, on the

night of December 30th, 1999, we had two fellows in a terrible automobile accident. One of them, the mother's son, almost died. I don't know whether it's appropriate what I did, but I took some stories out of my own life experience.

Another facilitator also confirmed telling stories from his life experience.

Absolutely, I did as well. I told them about the three alcohol poisonings I had had while I was in college. Not, not myself, but members that I'd had to bring to the hospital. One of them being my fraternity little brother... and, uh, ya know, I talked severely about that. And I think that helped a little bit. It's like, ya know, things that they did pay attention to were how long it takes to sober up, ya know, stuff that they hadn't learned before.

A third facilitator also supported telling stories as a means of going through CHOICES.

It was the first time I'd presented CHOICES, and I'd never taken it myself, so I was learning the information as I was speaking it. [My partner facilitator] started the session with sharing a personal example, so every page that was on the sheet, if someone didn't have a [story] to share, I shared one of my own and you could see, the people really opened up as you can all hope. We talked about real things, real issues, and the time went by quickly. It was engaging, and it wasn't a battle to fight to keep the guys' interest, we really talked about what really goes on. Not this, "We don't drink in chapter house, ever," sort of thing. We did not try to hide. We talked about the real stuff, it was important. And we made some really important decisions as a group, too. Like, if I am going to work out tomorrow, it's not smart to drink the night before. We talked about those things.

Engaging men in small group activity

Getting new members engaged in small group discussions was threaded throughout the facilitator debriefing session. Reasons offered for the “silence” included negative pre-EDGE comments by older chapter members, facilitators just reading through the material to get everything completed in a session, the influence of individual chapter cultures, and the underlying sense of competition when a group of young men come together for the first time. The PI offered his theory on the issue of domination.

Now, that business of domination fits into the boy messages that the guys bring to college with them. About what it is to be a man, and that’s one of the reasons that a lot of guys don’t speak up very articulately in sessions like this; it runs against those boy messages where you’re supposed to be strong and quiet; physically skilled; sexually active, misogynistic and homophobic. And those boy messages are very powerfully inculcated by things in our society, so that when we get them here, we’re asking them, instead of being strong and quiet, we’re asking them to be open and vulnerable, which is exactly the opposite of the messages that they have received about how they’re supposed to behave as men among other men. I’m wondering if, is there some period of reflection where we can prepare people for small group work, and explain what is expected of participants in small group work? If there’s one or two or three people who will open up and start to say things which are reflective in nature and which have some specificity, other guys will begin to open up to that, too, if they need that support.

In apparent agreement with at least part of the above, another facilitator said, “It’s a stigma of 19-year-olds to say anything like this sucks, no matter how great it is. But...we do need to inject more fun and free time.” In confirmation, a third facilitator reflected on

his experience in a chapter that has sent men to EDGE since the first one in Illinois was held at the Illinois Alpha chapter house.

I think chapter culture is an influence on the attitudes of new members. The chapter I volunteer at, and I side with you guys about the influences, the chapter I volunteer at is an example. From the beginning, the first year we sent people to EDGE, that was the one at the U of I, they came back and said, "It sucks". So it started a culture of negativity about EDGE, with everyone saying, "Ya know, this thing stinks." And they come away with a perception that EDGE is just a disaster. I mean, it's a big culture change. I don't know how to change [the perception] – it's hard to check. I think the best way for us to check that is to improve [EDGE] as much as possible. The only thing is...we will not see the benefit of it [until] four years down the line.

A younger facilitator said,

Not all the members see it that way. 'It's boring, it sucks, it's a waste of a weekend, but, I see the benefit of it.' Which is why I'm here as a facilitator. I agree with you. We need to change the stigma a bit, bring more fun in, and within a few years hopefully [EDGE] will have a good name.

Others supported his thinking.

I think that's one of the gripes about it. They don't wanna sit around and learn things, ya know, for a week or on a weekend. People today do not respond well. They do not learn by hearing. They learn by seeing. They are more engaged if they see things. I am not saying that we make the entire program video-based. But

if somehow we can work some type of visual presentation into what we are doing, I think that's better than all of us sitting and talking to them.

One man remembered a program from a prior Conclave.

If it's something alcohol-related that, I know, scared hell out of me and actually made a change in alcohol in my chapter, it was when we saw the thing in Conclave in San Antonio (2003) about the people [from another state] that had the fifty million dollar lawsuit. I don't know if we watched a video, but I know we had people reenact part of it. That would be awesome, because it wasn't a scare tactic, it was just talking about a real life situation, but it really did change the way we used alcohol in my chapter.

The PI brought up another visual concept, that of wall posters.

What if EDGE posters were in mailings from Headquarters, and mailed to all participants after a certain period of time? Because SigEp does not have photographs of brotherhood values such as virtue, diligence, brotherly love. They can be posted in students' rooms. I'm on a soapbox now. I gotta tell you that. There's an ancient Chinese proverb that says, "We are what we read." What you wake up in the morning and see first is what starts your brain thinking for the rest of the day. And it's something that is uplifting, that makes a big difference. All of you have been on college campuses, even a poster like the one here on the wall (points to the rectangular EDGE poster sent to the Head Facilitator from Headquarters). You know the posters that are sold in the Union just as fall semester starts. Kiss, the various rock groups, Jimmie Hendrix, and the misogynistic posters, the testosterone-filled women-as-objects photos that really

portray a kind of manhood that is not supportive of being a husband and father. I just really believe that SigEp needs to develop some poster media which conveys what we are about.

Another facilitator, a graphic artist, picked up on the idea.

Did you see those post cards and packet materials from the San Antonio Conclave? With all the history on them? Really great graphics and they all had – I'm a marketing graphics guy myself, that's what I do – I design. That was some of the most phenomenal marketing of our history I have ever seen in my life. It was actually a timeline, each postcard in the 1920s, the guy had Sigma Phi Epsilon [letters] on [a sweater], oue merger with Theta Upsilon Omega in the 1930s. They had visual pictures of each significant moment, and they had little timelines on there, they were phenomenal. And if we could sell those in a big format....I actually brought 'em home, scanned 'em, and printed 'em out larger.

The initial speaker who brought up the concept of posters asked, "Could those postcards be used in some way with the EDGE message?" The graphic artist replied, "Instead of these mailings, email thirty days later, maybe we could send out these postcards with, like [EDGE-themed] messages in them. From a business standpoint, handling is always a letter, a letter sent out."

Could you develop a couple email-able posters or pictures from this weekend that could be printed on 8 ½ by 14 paper – a little bit larger than a normal sheet of paper? What I'm looking for is something that can be put on a guy's wall or bulletin board. So we could send out an email and the email has an attachment with a photograph of their own EDGE experience. If it's got the message of their

fraternity, virtue, diligence, or something that conveys the Leadership Continuum, that could be really powerful.

In summary, “Let me say, that’s the best idea you’ve ever had for an EDGE. I don’t think we’ve ever done that before. But let me say, ya know, the marketing that SigEp had for EDGE was not bad this year at all. They were magnets, and I just have never seen anything like that in material from SigEp before. And another thing I wish is that they would come back out with the Founding Fathers poster. There are so many man out there that want a copy of that, but they don’t make ‘em.

Reviewing the themes emerging from the facilitator debriefing, the major issues were promoting a positive press for EDGE in chapter members, driving long distances with drivers already tired before they started, keeping the men engaged in small group discussions, using personal stories to illustrate EDGE concepts, providing sufficient time for physical activity and informal mixing among men from different chapters, and developing visually-focused materials that conveyed fraternal ideals.

Qualitative: The “Voices” of undergraduate EDGE Participants

The following section of the EDGE pilot evaluation report is focused on the second research question listed in Table 1: “How is EDGE experienced by student members?” Immediate student learning outcomes for each unit of EDGE programming are listed as units and themes are described. Student reactions to the CHOICES brief alcohol education unit were focused on the third research question listed in Table 1: “What impact does EDGE have on student alcohol and other drug use?”

At ninety days post-EDGE, the PI sent emails to 85 Frankfort EDGE participants who signed an informed consent indicating they would be willing to take the post-administration of the *Survey of Alcohol-related Attitudes and Behavior* at the end of the 2007-2008 academic year. Participants were asked to share how they came to be a member of Sigma Phi Epsilon, what they wanted to realize from their membership in the Fraternity, and which of their personal goals were supported by membership. They were asked to tell how they first became aware of EDGE, what impression they gained of the importance of attending EDGE, and if they had received any follow-up emails subsequent to their EDGE weekend. Research participants also were asked their opinion of their EDGE program, and what they had done with any materials from EDGE.

Follow-up focus groups were arranged with new member participants and chapter members who accompanied their younger brothers to the Frankfort EDGE from five chapters whose members attended the EDGE Frankfort retreat. The PI traveled to four chapters within a day's drive, Illinois Institute of Technology, University of Illinois, Illinois State University, and Purdue University. One focus group at the University of Minnesota was facilitated by an alumni volunteer at the PI's request. Four focus groups were held in January and February, 2008, and one focus group was held in late April, 2008.

A personal interview with Judge Mitch Crane was held on November 29, 2007, for the PI to obtain background information on the original development of the EDGE concept, and on his extensive experience as the principal EDGE Keynote speaker. The written interview transcript was member-checked with Brother Crane prior to its use in the present study. Frequent email and voice contact with SigEp Headquarters staff

members, Ryan Blanck, Coordinator of Health and Wellness, and Brian Warren, Coordinator of Residential Learning Communities, who coordinated EDGE programming was also maintained. Content from those emails were included as raw data for the document analysis used in preparation of the present report. Frankfort EDGE faculty members were also asked to provide written reflections via email that were used in the document analysis.

The qualitative verbal data collected by means of focus groups, individual emails and personal interviews from all sources were analyzed using a constant comparative method of analysis (Schumacher & Macmillan, 2001). Transcripts and other documents were read, re-read and compared with each other until a series of themes emerged from the verbal data. The emerging themes are described below in narrative form from the time new members first learned about the Fraternity's expectation that they attend an EDGE Retreat from their older chapter members.

Joining Sigma Phi Epsilon

The stories of how the men who contributed their voices to this pilot program evaluation determined to join Sigma Phi Epsilon were quite interesting. Participants were almost eager to "tell me about [themselves] and how [they] came to join Sigma Phi Epsilon." Many were not inclined to join a fraternity when they first arrived at college. Some mentioned that a brother's girlfriend took them to the brothers, and it was soon a "done deal". Others were very specific about the importance of networking after college, and still others named unique programming offered only by SigEp among international / national fraternities, such as the Leadership Continuum and the Balanced Man Program, as major influences in their decision to join Sigma Phi Epsilon.

Aaron (all names are pseudonyms to protect identity) was one who initially was against joining a fraternity until he encountered SigEp his sophomore year, as did several others whose emails are repeated below.

I was against the whole idea of fraternities after rushing my freshman year and not finding anything I liked. Fall semester of sophomore year was no different, but I decided to go to one of Sigma Phi Epsilon's final recruiting events because my roommate was going and I had no other homework to do. They completely changed my mind about the possibilities of a fraternity and I loved it. I want to learn more about myself through brotherhood and the opportunities offered. The focus put on academics will help keep my GPA up too.

Darrel was also introduced to Sigma Phi Epsilon in his sophomore year.

I came to join SigEp through friends of mine. I am a sophomore and had a hard time meeting friends outside the three guys I hung out with my freshman year. I talked to friends of mine and joining a fraternity, which had seemed unlikely my freshman year, was a bigger possibility. I decided to go to a few rush events to check things out and really enjoyed hanging out with some of the guys. I particularly enjoyed the influence of the Balanced Man program on the house. I continued to come back to events and eventually received a bid....Specifically, in my membership in the house, I really want to build strong relationships with guys in the house and have lifelong friendships. Personal goals of mine are striving to be excellent in my studies and to be physically fit. Being in the house, and having a constant reminder of Sound Mind and Sound Body, I think that this house can help me attain these goals.

Edward was yet another man who waited to join a fraternity in his sophomore year and had high expectations for the benefits of membership.

I am a sophomore. I was a three sport athlete and finished second in my graduating class in high school. SigEp seemed like the only choice, brothers who truly cared and success and friendship. I want to come to realize that there is more to college than partying and drinking. There are true friends to meet and true obstacles to attack and overcome. SigEp will help me ultimately to graduate and attain a high GPA as well as keeping me in line with the ever-seeking goal of a well balanced life.

The chapter GPA was important to a number of the men interviewed. Carlton's reaction is representative of many other similar statements.

I am a freshman at [names institution]. I joined SigEp because all the guys here seem like they knew what they were doing. They got their stuff done and they still had time to have fun. And that's what I wanted to do, so I figured if I surrounded myself with people like that, it would help me do better too.

Willis joined as a freshman after careful reflection and for very specific reasons.

I came to join Sigma Phi Epsilon for their beliefs in the cardinal principles. I visited [my campus] during my preview weekend while I was a senior in High School. I spent the night at the house and really got to know the guys. From then on I knew I wanted to be a SigEp. I hope SigEp shapes me into a man where I can be independent and a gentleman. I was told that I had many of the principles already when I joined and I just needed to make everything stronger. I want Sigma Phi Epsilon to provide me the opportunity of a good life. Connections in

the business world and lifetime friendships are two very important aspects I hope to obtain through my journey in Sigma Phi Epsilon. As for personal goals, I have brothers who are here to help me in my studies. Even though I graduated in the top ten in my high school class, it wasn't a very good high school.

Kerry joined after some careful observation of the brothers in his chapter at various social events.

I came to join Sigma Phi Epsilon because I met some of the guys from our chapter at social events and really thought highly of them. I see SigEp preparing me for the business world in ways that nothing else could. It helps to balance having fun with becoming successful, and teaches that business and life are all about building strong relationships through truth, integrity and honesty. This goes without saying, the fundamental virtue, diligence, brotherly love, and balanced man principles we all believe in so whole-heartedly.

The respondents also mentioned several subtle markers that convinced them SigEp was the best place for them. In particular, the "selling points" appeared to vary among the various campus fraternities. One freshman member said

[f]or me it had a lot to do with when I went to the other houses. They didn't sell anything except partying and going out. And I came [to SigEp] and they made it a conscious decision to make it about more than just social events. And that's kind of what I was looking for.

First Learning about EDGE

From the initial "New Member Camp" in 2001 to the current year's EDGE retreats, one of the major challenges facing those responsible for implementation of the

program has been just how to “sell” the undergraduate members on the value of attending the new member retreats. Based on his six years’ experience as a keynote presenter for EDGE retreats, one of Mitch Crane’s major concerns was the manner in which new members learned they were expected to attend an EDGE weekend away from their home campus.

Another problem is the publicity EDGE receives from the older chapter members in the period prior to attending EDGE. Too many older brothers describe EDGE as a membership requirement and not as a good time. If people expect a wonderful time, the more likely they are to have a wonderful time. In both focus groups and individual emails, the PI asked EDGE participants, “How did you come to learn about the Sig Ep EDGE program? What did your older chapter brothers tell you about EDGE prior to attending?” Andrew spoke for many focus group participants I interviewed.

It wasn’t clearly defined to us what was going to be going on. What was conveyed to us was that we needed to be there, and I believe there is a fine if you do not go. We were told that [EDGE] is important as an introduction, an introductory experience to SigEp as well as we needed to be there (A): to represent the chapter, and (B): for our own personal interest to avoid the fine. One of the Frankfort focus group participants, Charlie (again, names are pseudonyms in all cases) shared the following related reaction.

Uh, what we heard was, at least for me, a lot of mixed messages. Ya know, guys that would tell you it’s something that you’re really gonna enjoy and it’s a great opportunity. Or guys would tell you it’s pretty much just something that you have

to do, and just kinda power through it and put your head down. It's a lot of the same stuff you've already heard. So coming down I wasn't exactly sure, ya know, what to think about it. But I started just in the beginning leading more towards the negative side of it, just believing that it's something that I'm gonna have to power through.

Aaron's email response was similar. "I learned about the EDGE program through a chapter meeting. The older brothers acknowledged that EDGE was something that you had to attend, and would not be fun unless you put effort into it." Brian echoed Aaron in his email. "Older brothers told us we had to attend EDGE. They thought the program was boring, and told us to make the best of it."

Not all new members had such a sense of obligation. As Nate said, "I learned through my Sigma class about EDGE. The older guys told us it was a camping trip where you learn a lot of things about why Sig Ep has changed to the Balanced Man Program." Jim wrote that he learned about EDGE during recruitment.

I learned about EDGE when I first checked out the house by one of the older brothers who explained the Leadership Continuum. Later at our Sigma meetings we talked about it and all of the older brothers encouraged us to go because they all had such a positive experience.

Similarly, Brian's Member Development Chairperson described EDGE in positive terms. "I found out through our Member Development [chair] who basically described it as our new member camp in which you learn about what this fraternity is about and what it stands for." Kerry supported Brian's comment.

We were approached by the older brothers and informed that we had to attend EDGE whether we liked it or not. It was presented in a friendly way, but made clear that it was important and not to be missed. They told us that the experience would not only be fun but would be a stepping stone across the river of getting to know our brothers better.

Jarrel reflected on his attitude during the Saturday night focus group. He arrived at EDGE with a negative impression, but he was leaving with a positive one.

I kinda came in with almost a negative impression that EDGE was almost like work, like a class scheduled day, kinda packed in stuff, a lot of information that just came at you pretty quick and was kind of a little boring. So I had a negative attitude coming in and I would say I have almost the complete opposite coming out. I would say that basically through all the recruitment events [at our chapter] I got a pretty broad generalization of all the components of the Balanced Man Program and Sigma Phi Epsilon as a whole. I did basically know the stuff I learned today, but the steps we took today was making it much more specific. I think it is crucial early on in my development in SigEp. I think that it was extremely beneficial and it was a long day, but at the same point, it was a sacrifice that I think pretty much all of us are willing to make to learn the stuff that's necessary in taking strides to really taking out all that we can from our fraternity membership.

Cary reflected the attitudes of many men who were interviewed when he shared what he would say about EDGE to the next group of new members in his chapter.

I'm pretty much gonna tell them what certain guys in the house told me. It's either something you're gonna like or you're not. And you get – you get out of it what, really, you put into it. And it's kind of cliché to hear that, but it's really true in this instance. There's a couple of times you just gotta bite the bullet and go with it, and there's other times it's a blast and you really just like where you're at right there. You gotta take the good with the bad and just try to get as much out of it as you can.

The Road Trip to EDGE: Getting to know brothers better

One of the unanticipated immediate outcomes of the EDGE experience emerged in the Road Trip to attend the weekend retreat. For every EDGE retreat men from many chapters drive many hours confined in the same automobile with each other. There is ample time to discuss many issues, and to become familiar with one's new brothers in an environment with few distractions. Kenneth expressed the value of the road trip well.

The EDGE experience for me was truly about meeting my new class and getting the chance to interact with them. The trip for our group [to EDGE] was about eight hours. We carpooled down to EDGE and I really had a great bonding experience with the two other men in our car. Even months later, the three of us are not best friends, however, I believe I know more about them than many of the other individuals in our chapter. I got the most out of the trip down to EDGE.

A limitation of the Road Trip was that EDGE started the day after the night before. Many participants completed a full day of activities on Friday, then drove through the night to arrive in time at retreat on Saturday morning. One group declined to participate in the program evaluation because they said they were “too tired to complete a

survey.” Another group just wanted to rest a while before the events of the day formally started. The quality of small group discussion was also affected by the effects of their long drive to the camp. As Jarrel mentioned,

I would say that maybe the main problem with the [small group] discussion was kind of the inattentiveness of the people within the room. It seemed like a lot of people were interested in the topics we were talking about but, like I know the [mentions two chapters whose members drove eight hours to attend] the guys had long travels and they had long nights last night, and a lot of them just seemed like they had some trouble focusing. In the groups and generating discussion within the groups, it wasn't that they had a lack of interest, it was that they're pretty much just wore out. It seemed like we were going pretty much non-stop all day today.

EDGE: The cabin life

Another of the unanticipated immediate outcomes of the EDGE experience is the night spent together in the camp cabins. Whether rustic (showers and restrooms in another building) or with amenities (sheets and blankets supplied, and bath facilities in the cabin), the cabin time that men spent with each other proved to be a valuable bonding activity.

At the end of the bonfire the lead facilitator re-emphasized that while there was some free time scheduled, the men should go to sleep as soon as possible. There were a lot of activities still planned for the next day, and he asked that the men be alert for those events. In truth, the new members reported in focus groups and emails that bedtime was much more like the early hours of the morning. As one man said, “I don't believe with an

ounce of me that I was in bed before three a.m.” His group ordered pizza and had to wait for an hour until it was delivered. Sleep was delayed for another hour while the men ate the pizza and talked.

In another cabin, sleep was delayed while some pranks occurred.

Seriously, I went to bed at 3:00 a.m. I finally got to bed after he [points to another man in the focus group] was thrown into our room in a plastic bag. [laughter all around] In a trash bag! Me and some other guys were trying to sleep, and then we see the door open, someone throws this trash bag into the room, slammed the door, runs away. We are like, all right, whatever. I’m too tired to get down because I’m on the third bunk right now so we just keep telling stories.

Two minutes later, this kid pops out of the trash bag. That happened about 2:00 a.m. and we talked until about 3. We were just getting to know each other at the time. We were just hanging out with each other at the place; it was a good down time just getting to know each other.

In yet another focus group the participants were doubtful about expanding the EDGE retreat from one night into two nights, because that would mean two nights of talking and fun until 3:00 a.m.

EDGE: Chaplains (older brothers accompanying new members)

The EDGE delegation from each chapter was to have an older brother (preferably the Chaplain) attend EDGE with the new members to keep them accountable. Not all chapters have had older members attend with them, and on occasion the lack of an older member to keep the new members focused on their purpose for attending EDGE has been an issue. Men were asked if an upperclass brother went to EDGE with them, and if so,

what their presence may have added to the quality of their experience. As Andrew, from a state flagship chapter stated,

I think it was definitely kind of funny, because I mean, these are two guys who are a year older than me, but it's definitely a sense of kind of papa bear and his cubs. There was definitely a sense of leadership in the hierarchy in the cabin. The best discussions we had that day were in the cabin. The best discussions that happened at EDGE were in the cabin. And they were facilitated by those guys who basically were talking to us about what it means to be a Sig Ep. And they definitely had a hand in all of us being there. As it was definitely that experience and the introduction to the Leadership Continuum which I think is going over well.

Allen, from the same chapter, expanded on Andrew's statement.

Yeah, I think they really kept us in line just like, to make sure that we knew what we were doing. I think if it was just us younger guys going there all together, we wouldn't really have any direction of what to do or how to approach different things. Those two guys definitely helped us, talked to us when we needed something, or if we needed advice about anything it was really great.

Andrew and Allen's experiences at EDGE with older brothers present was also supported by a story shared in another chapter's focus group, when the men were not accompanied to EDGE by an older brother. I asked this group, who left the EDGE retreat site over the dinner hour and missed one of the keynote speakers, for the reasons they had done so.

Gordon responded for the group.

I don't know, we were all sitting in the street at Frankfort picking at, like, these green beans that we just pulled out of the grass, and we're like, you know what, let's just go. Yeah, when we were on the highway coming to the camp I think I saw something that looked like an Olive Garden. Going in that line and seeing those hamburgers that were wrapped up in a, whatever they were wrapped in. You get them and the bun was like fused with the meat. You pull it off that there's half the bun still sticking to the meat. The thought of looking forward to another dinner like that [was too much]. We are a bunch of guys that are, we're very impulsive; we act first, it's just what we do. We thought we were going to be back before the speech. We thought it was just a campfire [after dinner], so we thought we would be back on time.

In their confusion, the men missed the keynote presentation for the weekend, which had consequences for them later that evening and after they returned to their chapter. One of the men expressed his rationale for leaving the camp at the spur of the moment.

I think that part of the reason we left is that we knew [EDGE] was just short [overnight]. It was like, we're here, and then we leave. It doesn't matter how much trouble we get in because we're gone early the next day.

Senior brothers from the same chapter who sent the delegation to EDGE did not convey such a casual attitude to these new members. As one of the men who left the retreat facility explained,

We were told that [EDGE] is a good opportunity to make a good reputation for us as a house. We didn't hear much about the purpose of EDGE. That wasn't the

main goal in getting us out. They wanted us to know that we were supposed to give our house [chapter] a good reputation.

Other chapter delegations expressed a similar, competitive attitude toward their EDGE participation.

We try to pride ourselves on being the best chapter that we can. And then obviously there are subtle differences between chapter to chapter. I think it's something that is inherently just a part of a group of males, is that you want to be the best. You go to EDGE and you see the other chapters and it's essentially, you see your competition. You want to be the leader. I think [EDGE] definitely created an environment where, it was the first time it really hit me, we're really representing [names university], we are really representing our chapter. And that was one of my main motivational factors coming back [to his campus], to represent the chapter that much better.

EDGE: Workshop sessions by topic

Leadership Continuum

The immediate goal of the Leadership Continuum session, a half-hour multimedia video presentation, is to make new members aware of the range of developmental / educational experiences offered through the national fraternity such that new members are motivated to go beyond mere membership to leadership. The long term goal of the session is to increase participation in the Leadership Continuum, and ultimately increase alumni participation in the fraternity. Andrew commented in a follow-up focus group that,

It was definitely the introduction to the Leadership Continuum which I think is going over well [in our chapter]. [EDGE] was the first time I had the Leadership Continuum explicitly spelled out for me. I think that along with the speakers and the experiences in the cabin and learning to be a Sig Ep, that's kind of what hit me that [being a member of Sig Ep] was going to be something different.

For Kaylon the Leadership Continuum presentation opened his horizon to leadership at several difference levels.

I found it very interesting to hear about all of the leadership opportunities and where to go from here. I would have no problem in the future coming back as a volunteer and just trying to get people to be open minded and see the opportunities, like EDGE is the first step in a long line of opportunities you could have with SigEp. Just getting involved and learning about the programs, the house and all the positions. My group talked about it and we realize now that we're definitely the next class of [chapter] executives that are gonna lead. Our Sigma class is gonna eventually have eight executives up there in front of the entire chapter. We were talking about that and it was really eye-opening to realize how we could get there, and all these leadership opportunities we could get through programs like EDGE.

Brandon really "got" the immediate objective of the Leadership Continuum session to engage men in the fraternity's programs.

EDGE really got me motivated to want to go to Ruck and Carlson and Conclave, and hopefully maybe one day to go to Greece. I know one of the guys who was a

tour guide there [Tragos Quest to Greece], and he is helping me to where I can go try to do all that stuff and experience all those places.

Allen was impressed with the video format of the Leadership Continuum presentation, which is typically the only presentation that includes video as a medium.

I remember the first thing we saw was this video, and it had, like good music in it. You showed Sig Ep and something I guess our generation could appreciate instead of just like, “Well, pull out your book. We’re gonna talk about some alcohol now.” You guys really appealed to our generation and I thought that was an excellent way to present everything.

EDGE: SigEp Values Clarification

The immediate objective of the SigEp Values session is to introduce new members to concepts in the Oath of Obligation they will take as they progress through the fraternity initiation Rites of Passage. Principles such as Virtue, Diligence, and Brotherly Love, with the pursuit of a Sound Mind in a Sound Body in a Balanced Life are introduced in the small group setting. New Members are provided a handout detailing the various meanings associated with each concept. Patrick in the Saturday night focus group thought

“...there wasn’t really that much new information, cuz [in our chapter] we’ve gone though a lot of it [in our Sigma Challenge meetings]. There is more the depth of the information, especially going through what I went through, “What is Virtue?” “What is diligence?” “What is brotherly love?” And what constitutes a sound mind in a sound body, just like really going into depth into those helped me see what SigEp looks like.

Another man said he “actually liked a lot of the stuff on ethics, and on virtue and diligence, but I loved how to define them, and the breakdowns” for each of the SigEp values presented on the session handout.

EDGE: Personal Strategic Planning

The importance of step-by-step planning to arrive at major life goals as a meaningful personal value is the immediate objective of the Personal Strategic Planning session. The Tying-It-Together pressure sensitive follow-up form is completed during this hour-long session, and one copy of each participant’s personal goals is placed in a self-addressed envelope to be sent to the participant six weeks after the EDGE weekend. The objective of the mailing is to remind each new member of the goals they outlined, and to ask them if they are making progress toward those goals. Kalon said that EDGE was the first time he really thought about the importance of setting goals, and he liked the session’s content.

I’m gonna go with the goals discussions that we did. I have never been much of a goals person, or thought about what I’m gonna do a month from now or even really a couple weeks from now. I found [that session] to be really helpful, even though it seems really long since there’s a lot of writing. It actually did seem really helpful. The guy I was with gave a statistic about a study at Yale where three percent of people set goals and 97% didn’t, and then the three percent of people after a certain period of time had a net income of greater than the 97%. So I just found that the whole thing we went through showed me what it looks like to make a set of goals and how to hold yourself accountable. I never really thought I

would write them down and hold myself to 'em, but it really does seem now like that's gonna be something that'll help me achieve what I want to achieve.

One of Kalon's chapter brothers, Lawrence, described the difference between the EDGE session on goals and his chapter's Sigma and Phi Challenge meetings.

I'm gonna have to agree with him. We did a lot of writing down some goal stuff, but it was always just more like, "Always write things down for your classes," your Sigma and Phi classes. I liked how it was presented here [at EDGE] with this more of an emphasis on how you can improve, like, personally, and like, details on how you're gonna do it. And, go in depth on it. I really enjoyed that. I thought that was a great way to present it. I thought [the strategic planning session] was probably one of the most helpful of the workshops.

EDGE: CHOICES

A special SigEp edition of the CHOICES brief alcohol education program (Marlatt & Parks, 2007) was developed for use in EDGE retreats. Each new member receives a personal copy of the booklet for their use during the session and as a take-home item for later reference. New members read through their CHOICES booklet and write their own responses to items dealing with alcohol / other drug use and their personal reactions. After the items are completed, discussion about participant reactions to the information is led by an experienced volunteer and co-facilitated by an undergraduate leader. Maintaining good alcohol choices within a safe environment following risk management procedures is the immediate objective of the CHOICES session. In his focus group, Patrick shared the personal insight he gained from the session.

It was not until the very last discussion where we were going through the alcohol booklet that, like, I really knew that if any one of my brothers was in need, I would help him out, and just knowing that really gave me a bond with some guys that I really don't hang with that much.

Cary, another focus group member, expanded on Patrick's insight.

Just to point out the alcohol thing, ya know, in college and just through all your life in general, you've been taught a lot about alcohol and you know these situations happen. But just hearing it straight out of the mouths of other guys that, "Yeah, that situation happened to me before," or "Yeah, I've actually heard of that happening on campus," it brings it down to a really small scale to where you realize that it is really possible [to happen]. And it makes you just a little bit more self-aware to where you realize that maybe I do need to know what to do in a situation. After [the stories from other guys] I did become, you know, a little more attentive to what was goin' on with alcohol situations and how to handle it. I thought [the CHOICES session] was a really good thing and it's obviously something that a lot of people need to know, especially in college.

Jesse, a first semester student at the time he attended the Frankfort EDGE, shared a negative personal experience with alcohol over consumption and the insight the CHOICES booklet provided him.

I actually found the CHOICES session very helpful. That may be a personal thing because just a week or two before EDGE I had a bad experience with over consumption. And that just kind of showed me, and mathematically broke it

down, that I put myself in a very dangerous situation. That was really jarring, so [the CHOICES session] was really beneficial for me.

One of Jesse's chapter brothers added to the conversation.

I agree, the whole mathematical breakdown [of the time it takes to sober up] really does kind of put you in perspective and helps you realize the lasting effect of alcohol [in the body]. I think pretty much everyone got something out of that small group discussion.

Roman, in another chapter's focus group, echoed much of what was said above.

I do not know where my paper is, but after going through EDGE and learning about the amount of time for alcohol to set in, and all the charts and stuff, I really read into that and now, every time that I think of [drinking], I am just so much more responsible because before EDGE, I had no idea what alcohol would do. I didn't know any information on it. I showed my roommate the CHOICES brochure right when I got home, and he thought it was really cool how it was interactive; it wasn't just the basic facts. You could fill it out to cater to what your lifestyle is. So it's up to every individual to see how they deal with alcohol, and it really goes by the person first.

An email from a chapter leader on another campus reinforced the focus group content, but questioned if the CHOICES program was sufficient introduction to alcohol risk issues.

Recently, an event occurred where I was faced with the decision whether or not to call the EMS for a friend who had had far too much to drink. Due to my training and experiences as a Resident Advisor, in addition to specific training I have

received in first-aid and crisis management, I made the decision to take this friend to the hospital. There were five other conscious people at the time, but none of the others knew what to do. Ultimately, the physicians informed me that he had a BAC just under 3.0 and hypothermia was in onset. By taking him to the hospital, we likely saved his life.

As far as EDGE is concerned, I think the CHOICES materials that are provided are excellent, but insufficient. Some of the other five individuals who were present are SigEps (all of whom I would consider bright individuals who normally make great decisions) and, after the fact, I discussed what happened with them. They each admitted that they would have probably tried to let him “sleep it off” if I hadn’t been there to say otherwise.

I wouldn’t expect a program like EDGE to be able to provide adequate medical training for our brothers, specifically our newest members, so that they could be qualified to diagnose; still there should be a way to educate them, at the least, to know when it is necessary to seek medical advice or attention. I hope this can be considered as a possible addition to the training for facilitators and discussion with new members as a portion of EDGE because I know it would be beneficial for brothers in my chapter, and I believe this is probably true for many other [chapters] as well.

EDGE: Keynote Speakers

I think with the EDGE material, the thing that helped the most was...having the guest speakers come and talk to us. It was just phenomenal. That really helped a lot more than the **paperwork approach**. Uh, I mean we are college students. We're not really that interested in that paperwork kind of stuff, but when you have someone come in and talk to you about what happened and their experience about it, that really gets stuck in your mind.

Every guest speaker that was there was pretty good. I remember [Mitch Crane] and the guy in the bar fight [Frankfort EDGE] who had to have plastic surgery on his face were the two that stuck out. Both those guys had different approaches, but they both got our attention in different ways and it was, just really appealing.

I just wanted to touch on what I thought was the most beneficial part, the speaker [Mitch Crane] that spoke about alcohol abuse and sexual abuse. Along with the stories that [another EDGE faculty member] shared and the other SigEps shared at the bonfire was probably the most beneficial to me. Through the whole early process of being a member, you kinda hear about these events and about the brotherhood within SigEp, and how you have all these connections and how great they are, and the virtues and morals that other people share and will exhibit towards you. The stories around the bonfire and his discussion really showed me what you can actually get from having brothers there that are gonna pick you up when you're down, that are gonna help you through any situation that you are a

part of. It's just not all words in this Fraternity; there's actually power to back up the words that we speak and the values that we actually believe in. And there's people that are taking steps towards actually putting those values and morals to use instead of just our words.

EDGE: Keeping the handouts

One of the original objectives for the EDGE weekends was that participants would take the session handouts and worksheets home with them for personal reference or use in activities at their home chapters. At all the EDGE weekend retreats the PI has attended, discarded handouts were observed in many places, at the session rooms, in cabins where men stayed overnight, at dinner tables, and in wastebaskets. Since one objective for EDGE was that men keep the handouts for later use, knowing what men who took the materials home did with them was important. In all focus groups, and in all emails, the PI asked participants, "What have you done with the EDGE materials you received at EDGE?"

Most respondent's answers reflected a casual attitude toward keeping the materials distributed to new members during the EDGE weekend. One focus group respondent from a flagship university chapter said, "Actually, I still have them in a folder but I haven't really taken a look at them." Another man in the same focus group took the papers home to his parents and received an enthusiastic reaction from them.

My papers are all at home because I brought them back to show my parents what kind of things we were doing in Sig Ep at the time because they were a little wary on the whole fraternity thing. And I was like, here is some really good stuff that

[Sig Ep] was doing. And I told them about the activities that we participated in at EDGE. They were extremely surprised just because when they heard “fraternity” they thought of the stereotypical view of it. They were like, wow, carry on. I was involved in a lot of leadership activities in high school, and when I told them of all the values of Sigma Phi Epsilon, they [said] this is more of a good thing than it is a bad thing when it comes to joining this. And, uh, I don’t know, they just kind of have gone on encouraging me getting involved because they’ve seen how I’ve progressed so far in college.

One man said he takes his EDGE materials with him to meetings in his chapter. Several others in the same chapter focus group said they kept their EDGE materials in a file drawer folder in their room.

As the end of the EDGE retreat they were going around and asking you the questions about EDGE, and handing out prizes for the best answers. I got the Journey of Brotherhood book for the best answer to what EDGE really is, and I have that in my room next to my LRB (Lifetime Responsibilities of Brotherhood), and I carry it with me all together whenever I go to meetings. And the materials that were given on the alcohol abuse are back home on my dresser.

EDGE: The “spread sheet” nature of handouts

There’s a large section of people who aren’t too supportive, well, who don’t enjoy some of the things that happened at EDGE. Mainly that has to do with, and not to insult any of the forms we were given, but this kind of spread sheet approach that we were given... where I aligned myself with more of the idea that I’m going to develop as a person through more organic situations and

conversations, which is why I can't really tell you where my forms are. So there was that kind of response to EDGE, you know, with a little bit of uneasiness.

Another man from a different chapter also mentioned the "spread sheet" approach.

I don't typically buy the spread sheet, bubble sheet approach to developing leadership. I think [the spread sheet approach] is something often found in cheesy promotional videos. I find myself developing much more when I'm around people who are accomplished and I'm kind of just absorbing their approach to things. And I think just breaking [sessions] down and taking, not taking an informal approach, but taking a more mentor-mentee approach to the facilitators' [presentation] as well as more heavily discussion based. I think [the sessions] were discussion based, but I don't think they were very free flowing, at least for the groups I was in.

When men in another chapter brought up the "bullet point" issue, they were asked, "How could the EDGE materials be presented in a way that would have been more appealing to you?"

It's just harder to present it [to us], period. We have been doing this kind of stuff since high school, grade school, just filling out booklets and stuff. It's just a general stereotype. Sheets like this [picks up the Sig Ep Core Values form from my folder] where you get the sheet completely blank, I don't know. And you're looking ahead at the next half hour, forty-five minutes of writing trying to fill this out, competing with other people. I think the most effective way of doing something, like trying to portray this information, is when you're learning about yourself through these worksheets instead of just writing down what's your

definition of this is [Points to sheet asking for definitions of Virtue, Diligence, and Brotherly Love, etc.]. And when you're learning something about yourself, you're going to learn something much more engaging that directly applies to you, not just to filling out a worksheet.

EDGE: Facilitator Skills

EDGE faculty members are experienced upper class undergraduate leaders and seasoned volunteer alumni. The undergraduate leaders are often "Top Guns" who have attended the Ruck Leadership Institute at the College of William and Mary. The volunteer alumni are Alumni Volunteer Corps (AVC) members, Balanced Man Stewards, Chapter Counselors, and recent graduates who were involved as undergraduate leaders. Preparation for facilitating an EDGE small group session consists of reading a detailed packet of training materials, a conference telephone call the week prior to the scheduled EDGE, and a group meeting just prior to the start of the weekend. The quality of group facilitation skills among EDGE faculty was an issue among the undergraduate participants. As Cary said,

It was great that they taught us so much, but it was a lot of repetition and then it was a lot of trying to force a discussion that wasn't happening at the moment. Just moving on to something else really fast and then, just speeding. I don't wanna say it was too short 'cause it felt really long. But it felt like we just brushed over everything and we tried to force conversations that weren't gonna happen, just 'cause a lotta guys weren't invested in it. So [facilitating a group] is kind of like a delicate thing to do 'cause, you know, you do have certain things you have to

cover. If you could see something where, you know, you could see an obvious reaction, then I think you should probably stick with that [topic] and it'll make the entire process go faster.

Jesse, an upper class veteran of two EDGE retreats, reflected on the difference between “reading bullet points” and “free flow discussion” during sessions.

I would say the most tedious part [of listening during sessions] was throwing stuff out and it just got kind of repetitive. Leave all the material in, but you can kind of bring it down to a more general idea and hold a free flow discussion with [participants]. I think it would be better than reading bullet points, like some of [the facilitators] did. Some of the guys were really good at generalizing and just explaining things. And some of the instructors were more just reading the bullets down the list. “OK, now fill this out, read this, and fill this out.”

Harold elaborated on Jesse's comments.

I totally agree. I think it's much more effective to have to have the handout as more of an overview, then have the people look at it. Spend the time in the small group oriented around discussing your opinion on the handout, and have leaders answer any questions or talking points, rather than just listing bullet points because I think listing bullet points is where people just kind of get bored, get distracted and stuff. Have the handout as an overview, have people go through and do their thing on their own, and then bring it back to the group and talk. I think that would be a lot more effective.

As a counterbalance, at least one man thought the EDGE instructors were excellent.

Honestly, I thought they did a perfect job. I didn't have one boring instructor.

They would all like, make small talk on the side, you know, maybe put a joke in every once in a while. So, I think they did a good job.

Sound Mind / Sound Body outdoor activities

Ample time is provided in each EDGE Retreat weekend for outdoor physical activities. At the Frankfort EDGE, two hours on Saturday afternoon were devoted to participation in a ropes course. EDGE small groups consisting of new members from several chapters were challenged by trained facilitators (camp employees who were certified trainers) in a series of ropes exercises where teamwork, cooperation, balance, and physical skills were involved. As one man stated, "The ropes course was amazing!" Another related how participation in the ropes course affected openness in the small group settings.

I kinda found that in the first discussions we had, everybody was trying to get a feel for everybody else in the group and that they were maybe a little shy, a little timid about giving certain responses, and then we went out and did the ropes course. I felt even though we did not know each other at the time, we really talked to everybody in the other chapters and got to know everybody. And then when we came back after that, it seemed like the conversation was a lot better [in the small groups] and people were more open and we seemed more like a group, and it seemed like we could be open with each other a lot better, once we had gotten to bond. I really [came to know] a lot of the guys through that two hours that we spent on the ropes course better than I did just sittin' in a room with them kind of not talking a whole lot.

In the same focus group, Lawrence's observations of the content sessions before and after the ropes course experience reinforced the statement above.

One interesting thing about the ropes course was, like, I saw certain people in the discussions, and they thought it was basically class time. They'd take their hat, turn it down, and basically just kinda turn their head up and listen every once in a while. But when they get out on the ropes course they'd be just enjoyin' the heck out of it, and people were tryin' to lead and do all this stuff. So it's like different types of leadership. You got out on the ropes course and do more of, "Okay, yeah, let's get it done!" I thought that was kind of cool.

While the ropes course is good physical activity, the time to "chill" and meet men from other chapters was reinforced from one focus group to another.

Yeah, there was a lot more open discussion [in the sessions] after the ropes course. To do the ropes course you had to know some people and you had fun, like, you had leaders step up. You had no idea these guys were leaders until we did the ropes course. I actually had one of the guys in my chapter in my group and we sat next to each other the first session. After the ropes course I actually sat next to two guys from another chapter. I didn't sit next to the guy in my chapter because I made friends with a couple guys in my group. These other brothers were open with each other, and I just got a lot more friendlier.

EDGE: Developing the Bond

One of the aspects of EDGE retreats is that, for the first time, men in the same new member group leave their respective campuses and represent their campus chapter

and their institution at a gathering of men from many campuses and chapters. The time spent together as a delegation appears to have very specific benefits.

The main thing that I got back, and I think a lot of members in my class will agree with me, is that is the one weekend we realized we really were brothers now, and we're going to be with each other throughout college and friends for the rest of our lives. I think that [EDGE] was the first time we were actually close as a class, and, uh, when we realized that and started thinking about the future, talking about what's gonna happen, who's living in, and what kind of different positions [we wanted], even on the Executive Committee. [EDGE] was a real good introduction to the whole fraternity experience on like, who wants to go where and who [wants] to like take on what leadership positions. [EDGE] brought us together not only just as a class but closer, even though the rest of our chapter was not there, kind of informing us on the opportunities we have.

EDGE: Loyalty

Lawrence attended his first EDGE as an upperclassman. His comments suggested an increased level of commitment to the fraternity based on his EDGE retreat.

I thought EDGE was extremely beneficial, not only to the younger guys, but also to me. This is actually my first time ever being here, 'cause of other obligations earlier. Just meeting a lot of the instructors was extremely beneficial to me, like, they're convincing me, "Hey, you should go to rush [even though you are an upper level student], you should do this and that, and like, getting me just pumped up about everything. That's really helpful and exciting to hear, 'cause it really

gets you motivated and you go back to school and you're just like, "Yeah, let's do this!"

Discussion

Promising empirical evidence of risk reduction

The two-fold purpose of the present EDGE pilot program evaluation was (1) to collect promising empirical evidence of alcohol risk reduction, and (2) to observe the actual process by which an EDGE retreat was carried out for program improvement purposes. While empirical evidence of risk reduction was limited due to the small size of the pre and post survey sample ($N = 26$), preliminary results did show promising evidence of risk reduction. In particular, matched response participants self-reported a drop of 4.38 drinks / week (24 percent) in their perception of the average number of drinks per week among men in their chapter during a period of time when the amount of drinks per week self-reported by first time, first semester students typically rises (Wall, 2007). There was also a trend toward positive expectations of chapter life (less alcohol use, more fun doing other activities) (Lee, Geisner, Lewis, Neighbors, & Larimer, 2007; Trockel, et al., 2003). On the basis of the Frankfort EDGE self-report data, the immediate student outcome objective of the EDGE retreat, reduction in reported risky behavior, demonstrates promising evidence of success.

Perceptions of the Frankfort EDGE Retreat by New Members and Facilitators

Both participants' and facilitators' comments in focus groups and emails acknowledged that EDGE as carried out during the Frankfort retreat left room for future improvement. However imperfect the Frankfort EDGE retreat and follow-up contacts

were as experienced, the immediate effect remained positive. New members and their older undergraduate brothers who attended Frankfort EDGE came away with better perceptions of their EDGE experience than was apparently true of prior year's new members in their chapter. Many focus group participants reflected Aaron's original reaction when he first heard about EDGE. "I learned about the EDGE program through a chapter meeting. The older brothers acknowledged that EDGE was something that you had to attend, and would not be fun unless you put effort into it." Post-EDGE, Jarrel and Cary's more positive attitudes seemed to be representative of the men interviewed. As Jarrel said,

So I had a negative attitude coming in and I would say I have almost the complete opposite coming out. ...I did basically know the stuff I learned today, but the steps we took today was making it much more specific....I think that it was extremely beneficial and ... a sacrifice that I think pretty much all of are willing to make ... to really taking out all that we can from our fraternity membership.

Facilitators were almost hyper-aware of "the stigma" that EDGE carried with it from prior years. "I think one thing I ran into is that people were saying, 'People in our chapter told us this [EDGE] sucks.'"

Finding "free" time

EDGE was a concentrated learning experience in a secluded setting away from the usual on-campus distractions (football games, crush dances, concerts, etc.). Time for free play, "chilling", was almost not present at Frankfort. The only "free" time occurred after the Bonfire and prior to "lights out" on Saturday evening. Both facilitators and participants longed for more free time. As one of the facilitators observed,

I think part of it was that they wanted more of a night off. Even if it requires arriving earlier or if we can figure out some way to free up more of the night where they weren't [scheduled, then] they could go out and meet more guys and do that on their own. They're like, hey, we just want to make sure we have a good time and have fun, so give us some unstructured time.

A conflict associated with the relatively urban location of the Frankfort EDGE is that "free time" could also mean leaving the camp for area attractions, similar to the group that left EDGE to dine at Olive Gardens and returned too late to attend the Keynote presentation. One explanation for the men electing to leave is that an older brother, such as the Chaplain, was not sent with the new member delegation. Another possible explanation for their spur-of-the-moment exit is alluded to in their focus group comments.

We were all sitting in the street...picking at like, ...these green beans [that] were just pulled out of the grass outside. We're like, you know what, let's just go...on the highway I think I saw something, it looked like an Olive Garden.

Napoleon's quip that "an army runs on its stomach" also applies to fraternities. As one facilitator said, "I tell you, I don't know when I have had a drier piece of chicken than at Frankfort." One of the new members was more direct.

Going in that line and seeing those hamburgers wrapped up in a – whatever they were wrapped up in – you get them and the bun was like, fused with the meat. You pull it off and there's half the bun. I couldn't do it again. The thought of another dinner like that....

The urban location of the Frankfort EDGE with many major chain restaurants nearby, not to mention Chicago thirty miles away, would seem to make provision of “free time” an invitation to break the rules. As another of the men who left camp mentioned,

Yeah, we had a decent salad and spaghetti at Olive Garden. I think the main thing though was, the fact that we all knew we made the wrong decision, which is what unified us and created such a great bonding experience through all that.

Bonding experience notwithstanding, the men later wrote a formal letter of apology addressed to all facilitators for leaving the camp.

The road trip to EDGE

One of the administrative challenges for the Director of Health and Wellness is to locate sites away from campus for EDGE events that are reasonable in cost, of a size to hold EDGE, with adequate food service facilities, and distant enough from urban locations that unauthorized trips off site are impractical. The geographic location of Sig Ep chapters is also an issue to consider, since chapters in the far mid-west and west are such greater distances from each other. In many cases finding a site where some chapter delegations must drive six to eight hours is a near impossibility. Add to the mix the competing schedule of each chapter’s campus weekend activities and even centrally located chapters may elect to have their delegations drive to a distant EDGE site. After all, knowing that the Kappa Delta Crush Dance is the same Saturday evening as a nearby EDGE makes for a difficult choice. Many make the longer choice since the Crush Dance is just too important in terms of the chapter’s social capital. The facilitator’s concern for removing the “camp-like stigma” of EDGE and reframing the event to make room for “fun” seems well-taken (Lee, et al., 2007).

EDGE small group sessions

The conflict between “fun” and a weekend experience designed to impart several important educational messages seems rather obvious. Small group sessions held in a class-like atmosphere utilizing twenty different handouts over a twenty-four hour period was not well accepted. As one man shared, “Having the guest speakers...was just phenomenal. That helped a lot more than the paperwork approach because...we are college students...we’re not really that interested in that paperwork kind of stuff...” Another man in the same focus group continued, “I don’t typically buy the spread sheet, bubble sheet approach to developing leadership. I think it is something often found in cheesy promotional videos.” A third man agreed. “...a free flow discussion ...would be better than reading bullet points...some of the instructors were little more than just reading the bullets down the list. Okay, not fill this out, read this, now fill this out.” And from another chapter focus group, “I don’t know if I wanted to be told by a chart or a graph how to be a good person and how to show brotherly love...And I personally felt like, I didn’t want to deal with it.”

Lest the reader of this paper get the idea EDGE sessions are boring, the PI asked men in several focus groups to compare the EDGE sessions and facilitators with the instruction and content in their college classes. “Was EDGE any more or less boring than your university classes?” The answer was,

Way less boring. I didn’t have to take notes. I hate taking notes, and...it was more interactive stuff like small groups. Here, at a big school, most of my classes I’m in a classroom with like, 100 plus kids. I personally had a good time in those

small individual breakout sessions. I think a lot of what it is, is peer pressure to feel like, this isn't what fun is considered.

EDGE Session Content

The principal complaint on the part of facilitators and new members was the amount of “paperwork” men were expected to complete in the small group sessions. As one facilitator related,

In all honesty, they don't like the Leadership Task Inventory where they fill out forms, because they filled out twenty forms this weekend. They hate doing those forms. That's all they do is complain. And in the Leadership session, it's the same thing as you [refers to another facilitator's earlier comment]. They just keep complaining every time you bring out those forms. “I don't like to write. I don't like to write.”

While there was disconfirming evidence, undergraduates also brought up the “paperwork” in their focus groups.

I think with the EDGE material, the thing that helped the most was...having the guest speakers come and talk to us. It was just phenomenal. That really helped a lot more than the **paperwork approach**. Uh, I mean we are college students.

We're not really that interested in that paperwork kind of stuff, but when you have someone come in and talk to you about what happened and their experience about it, that really gets stuck in your mind.

As the man above suggested, facilitators “telling their story” and drawing the new members into telling their stories was much more to be desired as an instructional approach to the small group material.

Visual supplements to the small group material were suggested in several forms – Turning Point technology (<http://www.turningtechnologies.com/>), posters, visual attachments to emails, and the use of laptops and projectors(with PowerPoint visuals). The goal of each visual supplement was to improve the efficiency of presentation and the quality of interaction.

I think there are a lot of things that, with eye clicker, there could be a lot more done with it. It's not getting people off their butt and doing stuff, but it's making sure people are alert. I think it would be beneficial because you can kind of streamline the discussion a little bit more. You know what main points are going to get hit anyway. You could make your discussion a little more efficient and then you have time for other things. And new members would be very familiar with them.

EDGE handouts

One purpose of the multiple handouts used at EDGE is that men take them back to their campus to use in future reference. Unfortunately, the PI observed many loose papers on the floor and around seats after the Frankfort EDGE new member participants left for their return. Some men did keep the papers in folders, but most had not referred to them except to show their parents that their choice of fraternity was different than what the parents had anticipated.

My papers are all at home because I brought them back to show my parents what kind of things we were doing in Sig Ep at the time because they were a little wary on the whole fraternity thing. And I was like, here is some really good stuff that [Sig Ep] was doing. And I told them about the activities that we participated in at EDGE. They were extremely surprised just because when they heard “fraternity”

they thought of the stereotypical view of it. They were like, wow, carry on. I was involved in a lot of leadership activities in high school, and when I told them of all the values of Sigma Phi Epsilon, they [said] this is more of a good thing than it is a bad thing when it comes to joining this. And, uh, I don't know, they just kind of have gone on encouraging me getting involved because they've seen how I've progressed so far in college.

Some men do keep their handouts on file, but most focus group respondents had little recollection of them. Many found the handouts / worksheets to be non-productive in terms of their learning. They would much rather learn by story-telling.

It's just harder to present it [to us], period. We have been doing this kind of stuff since high school, grade school, just filling out booklets and stuff. It's just a general stereotype. Sheets like this [picks up the Sig Ep Core Values form from my folder] where you get the sheet completely blank, I don't know. And you're looking ahead at the next half hour, forty-five minutes of writing trying to fill this out, competing with other people. I think the most effective way of doing something, like trying to portray this information, is when you're learning about yourself through these worksheets instead of just writing down what's your definition of this is [Points to sheet asking for definitions of Virtue, Diligence, and Brotherly Love, etc.]. And when you're learning something about yourself, you're going to learn something much more engaging that directly applies to you, not just to filling out a worksheet.

EDGE speakers

Both facilitators and new members responded positively to the Frankfort EDGE Keynote speaker, Judge Mitch Crane. As one new member stated,

Every guest speaker that was there was pretty good. I remember [Mitch Crane] and the guy in the bar fight who had to have plastic surgery on his face were the two that stuck out. Both those guys had different approaches, but they both got our attention in different ways and it was, just really appealing.

EDGE facilitator instructional skills

EDGE facilitator instructional skills were a concern in the facilitator debriefing session immediately after EDGE, and for the undergraduate participants. Undergraduates were sensitive to the “bullet point” approach of some presenters.

I would say the most tedious part [of listening during sessions] was throwing stuff out and it just got kind of repetitive. Leave all the material in, but you can kind of bring it down to a more general idea and hold a free flow discussion with [participants]. I think it would be better than reading bullet points, like some of [the facilitators] did. Some of the guys were really good at generalizing and just explaining things. And some of the instructors were more just reading the bullets down the list. “OK, now fill this out, read this, and fill this out.”

Facilitators were also hesitant about their presentation skills, reflected in the comment below by a first time presenter.

There was a lot of material and, uh, kind of timelines to go through each of the seminars. Um, there was a script there. I wish I would have added my own things in more before hand. I did a lot of [that] kind of along the way, you know, “Oh, I

can add this, or this worked well.” The materials were very good, but being a first time facilitator I wish I would have had somebody helping me with my seminars because I was the only person at my seminars. It was a learning curve and by the end of the weekend I kind of had it down knowing what we were going to get done, what worked well, and where to really stress the strong points. But the first couple [sessions] were really shaky and I wish I could have had either more practice or just a little bit more help with knowing exactly what I was doing. I knew what I was going to be presenting; I didn’t know how at first.

EDGE Sound Mind / Sound Body Activities

Perhaps the single most successful activity at Frankfort EDGE was the low ropes course. Such an activity would be nearly impossible to reproduce on a local campus, and involved men from all groups to work together to achieve the goal of the specific ropes activity. Men from different delegations had an opportunity to become comfortable with each other on a personal basis, and at the same time complete a challenging physical test of their abilities.

Yeah, there was a lot more open discussion [in the sessions] after the ropes course. To do the ropes course you had to know some people and you had fun, like, you had leaders step up. You had no idea these guys were leaders until we did the ropes course. I actually had one of the guys in my chapter in my group and we sat next to each other the first session. After the ropes course I actually sat next to two guys from another chapter. I didn’t sit next to the guy in my chapter because I made friends with a couple guys in my group. These other brothers were open with each other, and I just got a lot more friendlier.

EDGE: Developing the bond / loyalty

One of the special benefits of the EDGE experience is that new members represent their respective chapters and campuses to other groups of SigEps within a short time of becoming members. The EDGE content, their in-group discussions in the cabins, and their awareness of being a representative of their chapter all seems to converge during the EDGE experience.

The main thing that I got back, and I think a lot of members in my class will agree with me, is that is the one weekend we realized we really were brothers now, and we're going to be with each other throughout college and friends for the rest of our lives. I think that [EDGE] was the first time we were actually close as a class, and, uh, when we realized that and started thinking about the future, talking about what's gonna happen, who's living in, and what kind of different positions [we wanted], even on the Executive Committee. [EDGE] was a real good introduction to the whole fraternity experience on like, who wants to go where and who [wants] to like take on what leadership positions. [EDGE] brought us together not only just as a class but closer, even though the rest of our chapter was not there, kind of informing us on the opportunities we have.

EDGE Follow-up

A long term objective of EDGE is to encourage a culture change within local chapters in terms of risk reduction, engagement in fraternity educational programming, and long term loyalty and alumni participation in the Fraternity. As a part of the strategy to encourage culture change as series of post-EDGE follow-up actions were planned. The Frankfort EDGE new members experienced all follow-up contacts with the exception of

two: the 30-day follow up by EDGE facilitators or their Chapter Counselor and the 60-day follow up message sent by the Keynote speaker. The follow up from Keynote speakers will be improved with the purchase by SigEp Headquarters in January 2008 of new technology to manage mass telephone messages (Ryan Blanck, personal communication, August 28, 2008). The 30-day follow up is, in the PI's perspective, of greater concern. The Director of Health and Wellness has indicated that the 30-day follow up will be addressed at the summer 2008 meeting of the National Leadership Committee. As other researchers have demonstrated, the fidelity of program implementation has a major impact on the credibility of a change intervention (Wall, et al., in press) and one the viability of EDGE as a method of culture change within the organization (Smith, 2003). One important objective of program implementation fidelity is prevention of intervention decay. Across time, the impact of an effective intervention is reduced or lost without regular feedback as reinforcement. Reinforcement of social norms perceptions is central to the overall success of EDGE as a new member program, and as a vehicle for culture change across the fraternity (Miller & Rollnick, 2002; Trockel, et al., 2003; Wall, et al., in press; Wechsler, et al., 2008).

Major themes emerging from all sources of data used in the EDGE pilot evaluation were summarized above. There is limited, but promising empirical evidence of alcohol risk reduction as a result of the EDGE weekend experience. Several immediate outcomes of the EDGE weekend were identified based on document analysis and focus group data. These outcomes in turn support the formative recommendations listed in the final section of this formal report for the EDGE pilot evaluation.

Recommendations

The objective of the following recommendations based on the pilot evaluation of the Frankfort EDGE program is to offer formative support to enhance the fidelity of overall program implementation. A second set of recommendations focus specifically on any future EDGE program evaluation design and methodology. In multiple ways EDGE is a model prevention program since a variety of teaching methods are employed, program content and processes are based on relevant theory, content is delivered in a healthy masculine environment, and delivered by older, in-group members to new members at an appropriate time (Nation, Crusto, Wandersman, Kumpfer, Seybolt, Morrissey-Kane, & Davino, 2003). There is room for improvement, however, in other areas associated with effective prevention programming, specifically, outcomes based evaluation and staff / facilitator training.

- 1.) The EDGE program and follow-up activities are well-intentioned and well-conceived as a means of environmental prevention and ultimately, culture change. Every attempt to increase the fidelity of program implementation should be made by SigEp staff and volunteers (Smith, 2003; Wall, et al., in press). Facilitators should pay special attention during their sessions to get current email addresses for all participants to carry out post-EDGE follow up. A back-up set of email addresses can be collected as men register for EDGE through Headquarters.
- 2.) The “stigma” of EDGE may slowly be changing to a positive image. Detailed positive outcomes pre-EDGE messages specifying benefits to new members

may be helpful (Carr, 2007). Program fidelity will help to reduce negative feedback and reduce intervention decay.

- 3.) EDGE facilitators need more training for their instructional roles than volunteers receive at present. As one method of obtaining additional EDGE trainers, perhaps a special “EDGE Training Track” could be established for senior undergraduates and recent graduates at Carlson Leadership Academies, reinforced with complementary CDs demonstrating model facilitation skills. Group process and facilitation skills training could be carried out by veteran EDGE facilitators known for their skills as instructors. The art of story-telling can be included in the training curriculum along with other group process skills (Schwarz, 1994; Workman, 2001). Such a Carlson / EDGE Training Track may be an additional means of promoting alumni loyalty. Moreover, acquiring the expertise of a skilled facilitator would enhance many alumni in their business and professional work roles.
- 4.) Engaging undergraduates in small group work requires special consideration. The in-basket “paperwork approach” to small group work that seems to be threaded within the small group instructional materials is more suited for business organizations, and needs to be supplemented with multi-media aural and visual instructional aids suitable to undergraduate visual and aural learning styles. Current small group session content is framed to accommodate the physical locations where EDGE is presented to new members. Rural retreat facilities are unlikely to have provision for laptops with projectors in each small group room. As a result, new members complete

a number of handouts during the small group sessions. If men are tired or bored due to the nature of class-like small group activities, use of visual technology (<http://www.turningtechnologies.com/>) may encourage new members to be more alert during discussions. The addition of laptops and projectors is an expense item that should be reviewed during the budgeting process for EDGE in future years.

- 5.) As a part of the EDGE introduction, "Choosing Your Attitude," all EDGE participants need to understand that the small group sessions will include activities that involve completing a personal set of EDGE documents to take home with them. Perhaps the addition of a personal manila folder with a place for participant names and appropriate Sig Ep logos would be helpful to encourage men to keep track of their papers. If the manila folder also "doubled" as a bulletin board icon with a suitable graphic representation of fraternity values, a dual purpose could be achieved.
- 6.) The EDGE schedule needs careful review to identify an appropriate means for new members to become acquainted with new members from other chapters. Two-night EDGE programs may be preferable over one-night stays in order to make room for greater informal sharing across chapters. The long term benefits of developing a national network of members who meet across chapters within several weeks of joining the fraternity seem apparent. Only in Sigma Phi Epsilon can a man join one week, and little more than a few weeks later, attend his first national meeting. The value of reducing territoriality between chapters is clear. An ultimate benefit of less "distance" between

chapters could be increased alumni participation as AVC members across chapters. EDGE participants could easily be offered the opportunity to initiate a Facebook group for post-EDGE communication.

- 7.) Alcohol risk reduction research results include the value of community service activities as one means of lowering alcohol use (Wall & Trockel, 2002).
Inclusion of a community service activity “giving back” to the EDGE site may reinforce the value of community service when men return to their chapters, as well as provide some of the time for informal networking across chapters to occur.
- 8.) Facilitators need to be acutely aware that new members from a chapter delegation know little or nothing about the history of their respective chapters. Each new member group is a “tabula rosa” which, properly encouraged, can restore a formerly challenged chapter to exceptional accomplishment. The power of positive expectations should be harnessed as all times (Bandura, 1997; Carr, 2007; Smith, 2003).
- 9.) EDGE retreat sites should be selected within reasonable driving distance of participating chapters, yet distant enough from urban centers that off site activities are discouraged by reasons of geography. YMCA Camp Tecumseh northeast of Lafayette, Indiana, for example, is not adjacent to any high population area. The Frankfort EDGE was just blocks away from an Interstate and a major U.S. highway.
- 10.) Chapter delegations should be clearly aware that leaving the retreat site early will result in the chapter being charged the same per man as registration, than

non-participation in the event. The attraction of a sorority crush dance is immediate, but the overall good of the chapter is better served by carrying through the entire EDGE experience (Wall, in press).

- 11.) A prospectus describing EDGE should be developed for distribution to permanent camp employees where the event is held. Employees should be aware of the goals of Sigma Phi Epsilon, and specifically how they can support the small group sessions as they work with participants in ropes courses and other physical challenge activities. Culture change has a greater likelihood when all participants have the same vision (Smith, 2003).
- 12.) The EDGE site director currently reports on the weekend experience via telephone with the Director of Health and Wellness. An event follow-up form to identify the relative fidelity of the specific EDGE program to the “ideal” EDGE experience should be developed.
- 13.) The quality of food served to participants is of major importance. Checks on amenities, including food quality, cabin space, and shower accommodations should be included in the volunteer EDGE director’s program evaluation assessing the fidelity of the specific EDGE implementation.
- 14.) Older brothers, preferably Chaplains, should always accompany a new member delegation to EDGE. The addition of a personally “known” older brother is clear from the incident described above. A known mentor accompanying each new member group reinforces EDGE objectives (Smith, 2003).

Recommendations for future outcomes-based research

- 1.) EDGE is only the first program in the Sigma Phi Epsilon Leadership Continuum. The “true” impact of EDGE can not be assessed without a six-year longitudinal follow up across all educational programs available through the Fraternity. A six-year follow up is recommended since institutions of higher education determine retention to graduation using six-year cohorts.
- 2.) At the present time, just under half of all new members attend an EDGE weekend. The current quantitative research design could have been markedly improved with the addition of a non-EDGE participant comparison group. The cost in terms of time, human and financial resources, is well worth the investment given the culture changing objectives of the fraternity (Sig Ep Journal, Feb. 2009).
- 3.) Subsequent EDGE program evaluations need to be carried out at enough sites to collect pre-post EDGE survey data with an N of at least 1,000, given the number of items on the survey instrument used in the present study. As mentioned above, sufficient resources should be designated to collect 1,000 non-participant EDGE new member surveys at undergraduate chapters on the same instrument.
- 4.) Provision to spend several days at Sig Ep Headquarters should be made in the next program evaluation. A great deal of data gathering occurs at Headquarters that the PI was unable to fully understand without an on-site visit.
- 5.) Focus groups for the current pilot evaluation were obtained from EDGE participants. Disconfirming evidence of EDGE impact could much more likely have been found by holding parallel focus groups in undergraduate chapters with new members who had not elected to participate in EDGE. Such focus groups

could be carried out with second year members when visits are made to collect non-participant EDGE survey data from first-year members.

- 6.) Results of reports such as the present one should be disseminated electronically to all individuals who agreed to participation in the research activities.
- 7.) Completion of a more intensive program evaluation will require several individuals to invest their time in the process. In addition to a project director (Principal Investigator – PI), the services of several regional volunteers to collect data, and at least one research assistant to coordinate daily details will be required. Such an EDGE evaluation proposal has been completed (Eberly, 2009).

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APPENDIX A

EDGE Frankfort Program Schedule

(modified for anonymity)

Small Groups

	Fac. 1	Fac. 2	Fac. 3	Fac. 4	Fac. 5	Facs. 6 / 7	Fac. 8	Facs. 9 / 10
	Personal Strategic Planning	SigEp Values	Leadership Challenge	Understanding SigEp	Personal Strategic Planning	SigEp Values	Leadership Challenge	Understanding SigEp
Session 1	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 4	Group 5	Group 6	Group 7	Group 8
Session 2	Group 4	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 8	Group 5	Group 6	Group 7
Session 3	Group 3	Group 4	Group 1	Group 2	Group 7	Group 8	Group 5	Group 6
Session 4	Group 2	Group 3	Group 4	Group 1	Group 6	Group 7	Group 8	Group 5

Identify eight small breakout rooms. Then, have the faculty rotate among the groups. It makes it easier w/ less movement... i.e. moving 8 facilitators vs. 100 undergraduates. So, Groups 1 will always be in the “Maple Lodge” for example.

It was best if you were able to randomly separate them into these eight groups as they register rather than during

I would make a copy and paste these in a separate file and print for each facilitator.

The agenda/schedule is on the second page below. As you see, there are six facilitators ready to facilitate CHOICES. I typically break up the group (in a fun way) into different groups and have the groups select/draft their facilitator (kind of like a “draft”). Make it fun.

RB

Saturday

- Faculty meeting should begin around 8:30 a.m. at the latest
- Check-in and registration 10:00 a.m. to 10:30 a.m.
- Kick Off (Large Groups), 10:30 a.m. (20 minutes max)
- Small Groups (Session 1) (probably 11:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.)
- Lunch (12:00 p.m. – 12:35 p.m.)
- Challenge Course (12:45 p.m. – 3:00 p.m.)
- Small Groups (Session 2) (probably 3:20 p.m. to 4:20 p.m.)
- Small Groups (Session 3) (probably will be 4:30 p.m. to 5:30 p.m.)
- Dinner (5:30 p.m.)
- Break

- Judge Mitch Crane... Perceptions and Realities (probably 6:45 p.m. to 7:45 p.m.)
- CHOICES (probably 8:00 p.m. to 9:30 p.m.)
- Bonfire and S'mores
- Debrief (show some videos, hang... let the guys get to know each other. Make sure this seems relaxed (to them) but you know the purpose is for them to hang/network/share ideas)
- Bed (lights out... you pick the best time... make sure they get their rest.)

Sunday

- Breakfast (8:30 to 9:00)
- Small Groups (Session 4) (probably will be 9:00 a.m. to 10:00 a.m.)
- Wrap it up (LARGE Group)
 - You will have them recap the program
 - Pump them up
 - Complete the follow-up form
 - Complete the evaluation
 - Collect the filled envelopes and dismiss

APPENDIX B

Focus Group Protocols

**Interview / Focus Group Protocol
EDGE New Member Participants****Researcher Opening Statement:**

Thank you for agreeing to talk with me about your experiences with the SigEp EDGE program. Please know that your participation is entirely voluntary and you are free to withdraw your participation at any time. I would ask that you read through and then sign, if you agree, the informed consent form. Please know your responses will be kept entirely confidential in the analysis and reporting of this project. You may download a copy of the written report coming from this project from the SigEp Headquarters website when it becomes available.

Interview questions:

1. Introduce myself and what this study is about.
2. Tell me about yourself.
3. What do you know about the SigEp EDGE program?
4. Have you received materials from the EDGE faculty or SigEp Headquarters staff about EDGE?
5. What have you done with those materials?
6. Member check
7. How have the materials been received by other members of your chapter?
8. What do you think of the SigEp EDGE program?

Thank you for talking with me about your experiences. Please know that your responses are confidential and you are free to withdraw your participation at any time.

Interview Protocol Institution Professionals

Researcher Opening Statement:

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Interview questions:

1. Introduce myself and what this study is about.
2. Tell me about yourself?
3. Tell me the story of your involvement with SigEp EDGE.
4. Tell me how SigEp EDGE has gone at your chapter.
5. What is SigEp EDGE to you?
6. Member check
7. What is good about SigEp EDGE?
8. Tell me about the support that you have received as a volunteer in planning to implement your role in SigEp EDGE?
9. What have I not asked you about SigEp EDGE that you would like to tell me?

Thank you for talking with me about your experiences. Please know that your responses are confidential and you are free to withdraw your participation at any time.

Interview / Focus Group Protocol
EDGE New Member Participants

Researcher Opening Statement:

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Interview questions:

9. Introduce myself and what this study is about.
10. Tell me about yourself.
11. What do you know about the SigEp EDGE program?
12. Have you received materials from the EDGE faculty or SigEp Headquarters staff about EDGE?
13. What have you done with those materials?
14. Member check
15. How have the materials been received by other members of your chapter?
16. What do you think of the SigEp EDGE program?

Thank you for talking with me about your experiences. Please know that your responses are confidential and you are free to withdraw your participation at any time.