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## A formative evaluation of a national sorority's recruitment program in its inaugural year

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## **A FORMATIVE EVALUATION OF A NATIONAL SORORITY'S RECRUITMENT PROGRAM IN ITS INAUGURAL YEAR**

**Colleen Elizabeth Coffey and Charles G. Eberly, Ph. D.**

*A formative evaluation of a national sorority's recruitment program was conducted to determine the effectiveness of selected program elements over the course of the first year's implementation. Primary objectives were to discover perceived needs among undergraduate members and chapters that were not met and to create program improvements based upon the respondent recommendations. A mixed method design employing a survey, the use of focus groups, and a review of available organizational recruitment data was utilized. Results indicated some participants understood and benefited from the recruitment program, while others felt pressure to recruit, and still others appeared unaware of the program's existence. Many chapters asked for a recruitment program tailored to their campuses' specific characteristics. Organizational data indicated a 9.1 percent increase in new member intake over the previous year, and a 10.2 percent increase in membership initiation. Recommendations include suggestions for program development, an examination of the national organization's communication modes with undergraduate chapters, and action- based recruitment plans tailored to individual campuses.*

### **Introduction**

One of the major components of sorority life is the recruitment of new members to join the organization. The recruitment process is often described as the "life-blood" of sorority chapters and colonies. Without new members the organization would cease to function. New member and continuing member dues and fees keep the inter/national organization and the undergraduate chapters and colonies solvent. Successful recruitment is also beneficial for undergraduate women in terms of perceived social status on a campus, distribution of workload, and cultivation of the bonds of sisterhood with as many women as possible.

### **In-College Effects of Fraternity/Sorority Membership**

#### ***Psychosocial Development***

Astin (1975, 1984) found that membership in a fraternity or sorority was positively related to student retention. Subsequent research yielded somewhat conflicting results, including positive outcomes (persistence, overall satisfaction with college, and satisfaction with instruction and social life), as well as negative ones (reduced intellectual self-esteem, higher status needs, and hedonism [in particular, drinking]). In a follow up longitudinal study of student experiences at over 200 universities across the country, Astin (1993) found that membership in a fraternity or sorority had "positive effects on self-reported growth in leadership abilities,...status striving, hedonism, and alcohol consumption, and a negative effect on liberalism" (p. 386).

Abrahamson (1987) sought to examine the influences of student involvement by sorority membership, and compared women who were involved in their residence hall environment to women who were involved in a sorority. Involvement in a sorority was positively correlated with additional involvement in campus recreation facilities, student organizations, personal experiences, and the student union. Ninety percent of the women Abrahamson surveyed reported the sorority had helped them to become involved in other activities.

### ***Cognitive Development***

Pascarella et al. (1994) examined the cognitive effects of membership in a fraternity or sorority among first year students and found negative effects in the areas of reading comprehension, mathematics, and critical thinking. However, a follow-up analysis of the same cohort of students demonstrated any initial negative effects on critical thinking of fraternity/sorority members compared to non-affiliated students were non-significant after the junior year (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Pike (2000) explored the influence of fraternity/sorority affiliation on college experiences and members' cognitive development, and reported higher levels of social involvement and general ability gains among members as compared to non-affiliated students. Further, membership in a fraternal organization was associated with higher levels of involvement, which was linked to greater gains in general cognitive abilities (Pike, 2000).

### ***Leadership Development***

Two qualitative studies relating to fraternity and sorority involvement and the college experience specifically focused on leadership development. Byer (1998) interviewed four men who were members of both student government and a social fraternity, and found both of these extra-curricular activities facilitated the development of leadership social skills, but fraternity involvement could encourage social exclusion. White (1999) explored the roles sorority membership played in the development of leadership skills among 47 sorority members who were peer nominated as being women who possessed strong leadership skills. Sorority membership appeared to "promote and expect involvement by members" and to "provide a place for women to develop their leadership skills" (White, 1999, p.171-173). Most notable were findings related to overall impact:

...the sorority impacts these members by providing support and encouragement to one another. The women are given opportunities to become involved in the activities of their sororities, and they are expected to care about the sorority enough to commit time and effort to it. These women benefit by becoming involved. Those benefits include being exposed to people with different viewpoints and learning to formulate opinions while incorporating other's views into their decisions. The women learn to think independently; however they are affected by one another and have changed as a result of interacting with one another. (p. 171-172)

### ***Student Engagement***

Hayek et al. (2002) compared measures of student engagement between fraternity/sorority members and non-affiliated students. Affiliates were similarly engaged, if not more so, than other students on such constructs as academically challenging tasks, active learning, student-faculty interaction, community service, diversity, satisfaction, and select personal learning and personal development gains. Pike (2003) found similar outcomes when examining the effects on



first-year and senior-year fraternity/sorority affiliation. Seniors who were members of a fraternity or sorority were significantly more involved in active learning and interaction with faculty members than seniors who were not members. Senior members also demonstrated higher gains in academic and personal development than non-members. First-year fraternity/sorority members exhibited more positive perceptions of the campus environment than their non-affiliated counterparts.

### **Background: Recruitment Practices**

#### ***National Panhellenic Conference***

Founded in 1902, the National Panhellenic Conference (NPC) is a governing body of 26 member organizations, which was established to assist collegiate and alumnae chapters, to cooperate with colleges and universities, and to promote interfraternal relationships. Among individual members, NPC's mission is to advance values, education, leadership, friendships, cooperation, and citizenship. On most college campuses, a campus governing body known as a College Panhellenic Council (CPH) governs the local operations of campus-based sorority chapters. The CPH guides the recruitment operations of each of the sorority chapters and *The National Panhellenic Conference Manual of Information 14<sup>th</sup> edition* (2005) offers specific guidance for recruitment to ensure that all groups maintain a viable organization.

Although the *Manual* provides regulations and guidance for sorority chapters, each NPC member organization has its own suggestions and programs for recruitment that are communicated to collegiate members. NPC groups contacted for this study respectfully declined to share inter/national recruitment programs because they existed, in most cases, as a resource for members only.

#### ***North-American Interfraternity Conference***

The recruitment programs of the North-American Interfraternity Conference (NIC) groups are similar to those of the NPC groups. Therefore, examining what fraternities were teaching members about recruitment permitted educated assumptions about what the sororities were teaching women. Structurally, at the collegiate level, the Interfraternity Council (IFC) is similar to CPH. The most widely used NIC resource, *From Rush to RECRUITMENT*, (NIC, n.d.) recommends that IFC and chapter recruitment practices be both active and direct. In essence, the NIC document explains that fraternity chapters are in a seller's market as opposed to a buyer's market.

The most salient information in this document is the five-step model of recruitment, which outlines the process that should occur during the recruitment of new members. This includes, 1) meet him, 2) make him a friend, 3) introduce him to your friends, 4) introduce him to the fraternity, and 5) ask him to join (p. X). The model places value on the importance of year-round recruitment and careful membership selection. Another NIC recruitment resource, *The Truth About Recruitment* (NIC, n.d.), emphasizes the five-step model paired with year-round recruitment, but explicitly states that recruitment is not "entertainment, alcohol events, events with women, events that cost a lot of money...(or) onetime events" (p. 1). The principles of recruitment that are conceptualized in these documents are communicated by member



inter/national organizations and campus advisors of both fraternities and sororities across the country.

### ***The National Organization***

In the fall of 2004, the principal investigator (PI) was appointed to the staff position of National Membership Recruitment Coordinator (NMRC) for her inter/national sorority. Concurrently, a new national recruitment program was formulated, which included many new services and expectations for the undergraduate chapters. The goal of the new program was to increase membership intake numbers significantly. The following steps were implemented to meet that objective:

1. The Regional Recruitment Coordinators (RRCs) and the NMRC made up the National Recruitment Team (NRT);
2. An article on a recruitment-related topic would be incorporated in each edition of the organization's monthly newsletter;
3. The National Organization would reinforce the message that each chapter should recruit year round;
4. The National Organization would reinforce the message that each chapter should recruit to meet campus total;
5. A national incentive, called the Plus One Challenge, would be instituted in the 2004-2005 academic year to encourage chapter members to recruit to replace themselves plus one additional woman each year;
6. A scholarship to attend the "Recruitment Boot Camp" (Stollman, 2004) program would be instituted for five women in five separate chapters selected by the NMRC;
7. A brand and name would be instituted for the national recruitment program;
8. Membership statistics would be gathered, compiled, and published for each chapter;
9. Chapters would receive and review the statistics;
10. Initiatives would be established to encourage chapters to recruit using the teams recruitment model, which was to be developed using ideas from the North-American Interfraternity Conference publication *From Rush to Recruitment* and the "Recruitment Boot Camp" (Stollman, 2004) curriculum from CAMPUSPEAK, Inc;
11. Chapter visits would be conducted by RRCs and the NMRC to improve recruitment operations and challenges with staff members present;
12. A recruitment resource CD would be distributed to chapters and colonies in the summer of 2005;
13. Consistent communication would be initiated between the NRT and chapter women who had questions;
14. Chapters would be grouped in one of three statuses: target, benefit, and healthy;
15. And, a Yahoo® group listserv would be established for chapter recruitment directors and advisers.

### **Method**

#### ***Data Collection***

There were three facets to the data collection process in this formative evaluation study (Fitz-Gibbon & Morris, 1987). The first two parts of the data collection took place during the National

Organization's June 2005 undergraduate officer leadership training conference. All members of each chapter or colony in attendance received a specific folder that corresponded with the chapter offices they held.

**Facet one.** Undergraduate recruitment directors for each chapter represented at the leadership training conference received the National Recruitment Program Survey (NRPS) in their conference folders. The PI explained the purpose of the study and the informed consent protocol. Chapter delegations were told they could opt out of the process should they choose to do so. The groups had until the next morning to return the completed NRPS to the PI. The NRPS included eleven questions related to the undergraduate participants' perceptions and understanding of the national recruitment program. Answers were given on a five-point scale ranging from 1 (not true at all) to 5 (absolutely true). Participants were also encouraged to make free response comments under each Likert scale item. In addition, the survey asked five open-ended questions with similar objectives to the Likert items.

**Facet two.** Focus groups on recruitment practices were held on the evening of the second day. During the PI's opening remarks about the study, participants were encouraged, but not required, to attend these focus groups. When chapter members arrived for the planned, one-hour focus group sessions, they were each given an index card with either a red, blue, or green dot. Participants with a red or blue dot card were selected for the research focus groups. Participants with a green dot card represented the control group. A total of twenty-four volunteer participants were randomly assigned to two focus groups. The 24 focus group participants originated from 21 unique chapters and colonies. A second informed consent form for participation in the focus groups was explained and completed by participants.

The focus groups were recorded and led by two senior Regional Recruitment Coordinators (RRCs) and were observed by the National Risk Management Coordinator and another RRC. Participants in the focus groups were asked a series of structured, open-ended questions relating to their perceptions and understanding of the national recruitment program. Although this may have created a biased response, the students were very forthcoming in their answers.

**Facet three.** Existing records of the sorority related to membership intake numbers during the year prior to the inception of the national recruitment program (2003-2004) and during the 2004-2005 academic year were tabulated. These were then used in descriptive analysis.

### ***Data Analysis***

Completed group surveys were gathered from 48 chapter executive committees attending the leadership training conference. Eight chapter delegations chose not to participate in the research, so there was an 85.7 percent response rate. The resulting data were entered into a database and analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS, v. 14). Frequency distributions, cross-tabulations, and Pearson product-moment correlations were computed for the following survey variables: the perceptions of the effectiveness of the NRT (Item 1) and the perceptions of the helpfulness of the NRT (Item 3); the familiarity of the chapter with the Plus One Challenge (Item 6) and the familiarity of the chapter with teams recruitment (Item 7); the familiarity of the chapter with teams recruitment (Item 6) and the perceptions of the helpfulness of the NRT (Item 3); and the chapter's feelings on being held accountable in a good way to maintain a healthy size



(Item 8) and the chapter's feeling on being pressured in a bad way to maintain a healthy size (Item 9). The open-ended questions and other comments on the survey were tabulated by the PI's examination of common themes that emerged within the answers using the constant comparative method of qualitative data analysis (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001).

Focus group data were also analyzed using the constant comparative method, and common themes among the group conversations were identified. In addition, written notes from the two focus group observers (a National Risk Management Coordinator and a Regional Recruitment Coordinator) were examined carefully. After the focus groups were completed, the PI facilitated a de-briefing session wherein the focus group leaders and observers were given the opportunity to communicate their thoughts, frustrations, and feelings about the focus group process. The researcher also took field notes on what was communicated during this time from the tape recording. The focus group data, focus group observer notes, and the field notes served as a method of triangulation for the focus group experience.

The data on membership intake and membership initiation for 2003-2004 and 2004-2005 were tabulated by a national staff member. The staff member based these recruitment numbers on the amount of new member dues and initiation fees paid by individual chapters and colonies for each year.

## Findings

### *Survey Data*

The National Recruitment Program Survey (NRPS) was completed as a group by the executive committees (four women from each chapter) of 48 chapters represented at the leadership training conference. The composite group completed the survey without supervision. Responses to the eleven items in the quantitative section of the NRPS were scored on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (not true at all) to 5 (absolutely true). Participants also had the option to indicate a not applicable response.

*I know what the Plus One Challenge is* (Item 6) yielded the highest mean response with a score of 4.13 (Table 1). The Plus One Challenge was defined as replacing oneself with a new member, plus one more. Nearly seventy percent of the valid responses indicated that this statement was 5, absolutely true.

*The National Recruitment Team helped my chapter this year* (Item 3) yielded the lowest mean response with a score of 2.16. Fifty-four percent of the participants reported this statement was not true at all. Other low mean responses were to *My chapter has an improved recruitment program because of the National Recruitment Team* (Item 11), with a mean score of 2.60, and *I am familiar with teams recruitment* (Item 7), with a mean score of 2.58 and 48.9% of respondents indicating that this statement was 1, not true at all.

A mean response above 3.0 was found for *My questions about recruitment were answered in a timely manner* (Item 4), with a mean score of 3.97. Forty-two percent of all respondents indicated that this statement was 5, absolutely true.



*I feel that my chapter is pressured in a bad way by the National Recruitment Team to maintain a healthy size* (Item 9) was the only item where a lower score indicated a positive response. This item had a mean score of 2.23, and 45.5% of respondents indicated that this statement was 1, not true at all.

There were two items where 40% or more of the subjects indicated a response of 3: *I feel that the National Recruitment Team did an effective job this year* (Item 1) and *I found the [monthly newsletter] articles and other communications sent out by the National Recruitment Team useful* (Item 10). Missing responses, where subjects indicated N/A, were prominent in *My questions about recruitment were answered in a timely manner* (Item 4), with 15 missing responses; *The National Recruitment Team has good ideas for me to use* (Item 5), with 10 missing responses; and *I feel that the National Recruitment Team did an effective job this year* (Item 1), with 8 missing responses.

Four cross-tabulations using chi-square tests revealed a significant statistical relationship between two items, *I feel that the National Recruitment Team did an effective job this year* (Item 1) and *The Recruitment Team helped my chapter this year* (Item 3),  $\chi^2 = 36.964$  (df=16),  $p < .002$ ; and a cross tabulation of *I know what the Plus One Challenge is* (Item 6) and *I am familiar with teams recruitment* (Item 7),  $\chi^2 = 29.914$  (df = 16),  $p < .018$ .

**Table 1**  
*National Recruitment Program Survey Results by Item*

Item number and content	Total	Response categories						Mean
		1	2	3	4	5	NA	
1. Team did effective job	40	12.5	2.5	47.5	30.0	7.5	8	3.18
2. Knew RRC or NMRC	42	28.6	14.3	14.3	14.3	28.6	6	3.00
3. Team helped chapter	43	53.5	7.0	18.6	11.6	9.3	5	2.16
4. Questions answered timely	33	9.1	0.00	18.2	30.3	42.4	15	3.97
5. NRT good ideas	38	2.6	23.7	18.4	31.6	23.7	10	3.50
6. Know Plus One Challenge	46	15.2	2.2	6.5	6.5	69.9	2	4.13
7. Know teams recruitment	45	48.9	11.1	2.2	8.9	28.9	3	2.58
8. Accountable good way	44	13.6	18.2	31.8	18.2	18.2	4	3.09
9. Pressured bad way	44	45.5	15.9	15.9	15.9	6.8	4	2.23
10. Newsletter was helpful	45	8.9	20.0	40.0	22.2	8.9	3	3.02
11. Chapter improved b/c of NRT	42	35.7	11.9	19.0	23.8	9.5	6	2.60

***Responses to Open-Ended Questions***

The survey had five open-ended questions relating to participants' perceptions of the NRT and the national recruitment program (Question 1), the areas of recruitment they felt they needed help with (Question 2), perceptions of the Plus One Challenge (Question 3), knowledge of whom to contact with recruitment-related questions (Question 4), and any other comments they wanted to share (Question 5). The open-ended questions yielded many responses with similar content.

***Plus One Challenge.*** Groups alternatively cited that the Plus One Challenge did not work for small campuses and that it did not work for large campuses. Smaller chapters stated comments similar to the following: "It is obtainable, but for colleges with small Greek populations it is difficult to recruit that many girls." Larger chapters made comments like: "It is obtainable for some chapters, not all. [We would like a] new challenge next year that we can do," and "We feel that challenges should be tailored to individual chapters."

***Teams Recruitment Concept.*** Findings for large and small campuses were consistent in student comments about the teams recruitment concept such as: "Teams recruitment does not necessarily seem appealing to already large chapters. Motivation for this is difficult," and "[teams recruitment is] hard to do with small chapters and Greek life not being popular on campus."

***Knowledge of Services/Communication.*** Some chapters did not know about the NRT, Plus One Challenge, or teams recruitment concept at all. Some examples of their comments are as follows: "[I] was not informed on the national recruitment team," "I wasn't given anyone to contact, I did not know who to contact," "We are unaware of what you do for us," "[teams recruitment was an] idea...never explained to us," "We were not affected (by the NRT) because we were not contacted," "I do not really understand the Plus One Challenge," and "We did not know who the RRC was because they kept changing."

Chapters who did know about the national recruitment program appeared to be positive in their responses when they actually knew their RRC or the NMRC, stating things like "Our (RRC) [name omitted] was fantastic," "open communication was marvelous," and "The conversation I had with the NMRC [name omitted] was what basically enabled us to recruit the girls we did last semester."

Many chapters reported they had people to contact for recruitment help, offering comments such as "When in need of help I contacted the NMRC [name omitted] and she was great," "The NRT has good communication and prompt answers for questions," "I always contact (RRC) [name omitted]," and "(the NRT is) very accessible."

***Feelings of Pressure.*** Other chapters felt "constant pressure" to recruit. Their comments included the following: "We were pressured to take more girls even though we were already over quota," "If we do not maintain a healthy size, our chapter might be looked at as if [we have] a problem," and "Our chapter is doing what we can to promote [the national sorority] on campus and find women [to join the organization] but [we] feel that the NRT complained we were doing an inadequate job."



Chapters often communicated that recruitment should be about recruiting members who are of a high "quality" as opposed to a large "quantity." The campuses that host [chapters of the national sorority] are all unique, and a notable number of chapters asked for a recruitment plan specifically tailored to their type of campus, citing that a blanket plan for every chapter simply can not be applied to their campus. For example, one respondent said, "[The NRT] did not take into consideration the characteristics of the individual campus and tailor a program accordingly."

Chapters also indicated a desire for a recruitment online listserv to be utilized, providing comments like "It would be helpful if there were some kind of website [sic] or online group or even [a] newsletter circulated over the Internet for all chapters so we could give each other ideas. It would be a good way for us to keep in touch with other chapters."

Many groups cited problems motivating members to recruit: "We got plenty of information and ideas for recruiting, but we are struggling with motivation. Our girls just don't seem motivated to follow through."

**Campus Culture.** Finally, some groups commented about their unique campus cultures: "We have no girls [on our campus]," and "We are not recognized on campus." Another group had perceptions that their university did not support fraternity and sorority membership and had challenges with the effectiveness of their CPH: "[We have] Panhellenic issues [and] problems with [the] campus Greek Advisor, [We have] issues with [not] being able to rush freshmen...[this is] extremely detrimental to all aspects of our chapter."

### ***Focus Groups***

Student participants were asked a series of open-ended questions by focus group facilitators and were encouraged to freely respond. Several common themes emerged from these conversations. Consistent with the findings related to the open-ended questions, focus group participants seemed to feel pressure from the NRT to recruit. One group member stated, "Don't push numbers so much, [you should] bring back good GPA and other things as standard." Another stated, "Recruitment is now no-frills... With Nationals [sic] somehow it still seems it is about that...chapters have big fancy things, high numbers and that is why they are the best..." Other group members commented:

...When I first joined we focused a lot on academics, the way we presented ourselves...this past semester we were so worried about meeting quota that we were taking girls just for numbers. I am not sure if it was Nationals [sic] wanting us to build so much or what it was...they have upped their standards, and that's a lot of pressure. We see these girls and we want them, we just can't get them...it makes our sorority look bad in the long run...

and

We have been having trouble as a chapter recruiting...I just kind of got made recruitment chair...I have been in constant contact with [officials names omitted]...they have wanted me to email them. It is a lot of pressure on me and some women in my chapter aren't pulling through...It is falling on the shoulders of the recruitment chair a lot there is only



so much that the recruitment chair can do and that is the one person who is getting all of the emails...it is kind of discouraging sometimes when you have to email all of these people back (that) we only had two people come (to a recruitment event.)

Many participants cited the need to recruit "quality" not "quantity" and were not aware of the Plus One Challenge, the teams recruitment concept, or that the NRT even existed. One comment offered was as follows: "this might sound really stupid...but we came here today and when you guys started talking about this we had no idea what was going on...we don't even know what the Plus One Challenge is." In both focus groups, facilitators had to explain both the teams recruitment concept and the Plus One Challenge to participants during the process of the group experience.

Some participants reported although the NRT did have excellent ideas, their chapter needed more on-site support to actually implement what they were being told.

We get all of these excellent ideas from National Staff about how to get the girls...but I think, I am not trying to say come and do it for us, but when we try to implement (the ideas) we feel so frustrated that we are not (succeeding).

In addition, there appeared to be several different types of campuses represented in the focus group: "(The NRT was) giving us good examples of stuff we could do but given the small campus we are on it is pretty impractical at this point," "the Greek system (on my campus) is very formalized, very organized, very...strict," "In our chapter we aren't recognized by our school...we haven't been since the early 90's...some stuff went down with fraternities but we are still alive and have been since the 90's, we are just not recognized." Another group member reported:

Our school is a commuter school so sometimes it can be a little harder...we had two people out of our chapter of nine...who lived on campus. One girl commutes from an hour away. Getting the time commitment (for recruitment) is just really hard sometimes... Even when people are there they are like 'I'm tired, I have a paper to write, I have a test tomorrow...

Some chapters are represented on campuses that appear unsupportive and even stifling of sorority life. One group member communicated her frustrations with the sorority community:

...we are so much different than some of the other organizations on our campus...it is always a competition and it is not supposed to be. We are supposed to be building Greek life not just [our sorority]... (sororities) are always on edge with each other and I don't like it.

In addition, one woman communicated that she was told three different things from three different staff members about recruitment:

This past year was a really a tough time for my chapter, we had two EC visits, one Regional Recruitment Director [sic] visit, and a District President visit...sometimes it got

confusing... (the first EC who came in) told us one thing and we had another EC come in who told us something completely different and then [name omitted] came in and (said) you (should) do it this way so we pretty much stuck with what [she] told us.

There appears to be a theme of social rankings among sorority chapters on some campuses. Women described "not being in a top house" as part of their problem with recruitment. In addition, in each group the new recruitment process prescribed by NPC was mentioned, "Maybe the biggest thing [we need] is just involvement [from the NRT] even though we are a healthy chapter and we do make quota, we still need help...especially with us going into a totally new recruitment style." While some women had positive things to say about the National Organization, "Nationals [sic] is stepping it up...I can think of at least 3 people that have come to help us out," the underlying theme of the focus groups was that there are definitely areas of the national recruitment program with room for improvement.

#### ***Archival Data***

The existing data on recruitment, based on new member and initiation fees payments, was provided by the National Organization. The data compared new member intake and membership initiation between the 2003-2004 and 2004-2005 academic years. There was a 9.1% increase in new member intake over the course of the 2004-2005 academic year and a 10.2% increase in membership initiation. It should be noted that during the 2003-2004 academic year one colony group of 33 women was initiated and during the 2004-2005 academic year three colony groups totaling 68 women were initiated. The attrition rate for new members in both 2003-2004 and 2004-2005 was slightly over 10%.

#### ***Limitations***

There were several limitations to this study, the first of which pertained to the sample. Participants in the study were undergraduate members of the National Organization who attended the bi-annual, sorority leadership training conference. In theory, the women participating were to be the chapter president in addition to officers in charge of new member education, alumnae relations, risk management, and recruitment; however, in some cases, these specific chapter officers were not able to attend the conference. Because the national recruitment program had been targeted primarily at chapter recruitment directors during the previous year, and not all chapter recruitment directors were in attendance at the leadership training conference to participate in the surveys and focus groups, it is likely that some participants in the survey and focus groups may not have been equipped to accurately evaluate the program. However, all attendees were women who were committed to their involvement in the organization, since they traveled to take place in the conference. This may also be a notable limitation due to the fact that these chapter leaders represented only a small sample population of the entire chapter and an even smaller sample of undergraduate members nationwide.

There were also financial and time limitations that constrained focus group facilitator and observer training. Training was completed only via phone and email. Moreover, focus group facilitators and observers were National Organization officers, so undergraduates may have guarded their comments. The focus group recordings were not of excellent quality and at times were hard to hear, which resulted in some data loss. However, common themes emerged among



the survey and focus group responses. One focus group facilitator became too involved in the focus group's comments and started to lead the group rather than guide students' responses, so this could have impeded the responses of these participants (Pickering & Calliotte, 1993). However, data from both focus groups yielded the same general themes despite the issues surrounding data collection.

The program evaluation was done as a part of another ongoing leadership development curriculum during the leadership training conference and was administered over the course of a program-intensive weekend. This could have impeded participants' desire or time to fill out the survey and actively participate in the focus groups. Finally, the national recruitment data used were based solely on the chapters and colonies that paid new member and initiation fees. The payment of these per-member fees is self-reported by chapters and colonies and sometimes may not reflect accurate statistics for membership intake. In addition, some groups pay these dues and fees late or not at all. In other words, there is no way to know the exact number of women pledged and initiated to the National Organization each year, but the present data are as close to accurate as possible given the limitations.

### **Conclusions**

The purposes of this project were to determine the effectiveness of an NPC sorority's national recruitment program over the course of its inaugural year; to discover any perceived needs among undergraduate members and chapters that were not met over the course of that year; and to create recommendations for the program to be implemented during the 2006-2008 biennium. The study sought to answer two questions: 1) what are the undergraduate women's perceptions of the national recruitment program; and, 2) were the initiatives of the national recruitment program communicated effectively to the undergraduate chapters?

#### ***Undergraduate Members' Perceptions of the National Recruitment Program***

Undergraduate members' perceptions of being pressured to recruit and to maintain a healthy chapter size were mixed. Quantitative data suggested nearly half of all participants did not feel they were pressured to maintain a healthy chapter size. In contrast, open-ended questions and focus group responses revealed an overwhelming feeling of pressure to recruit members. Some women felt as if they were recognized only on the basis of having high membership numbers. Although 69.9% of respondents recognized the Plus One Challenge program, only 28.9% indicated they were familiar with the teams recruitment concept. The Plus One Challenge and teams recruitment concept were communicated in very similar ways, via the RRCs, NMRC, and the monthly newsletter. The Plus One Challenge was a part of the program at the onset of the academic year, while the teams recruitment initiative began in November. These data are significant for the National Organization holistically, as the newsletter is one of the organization's primary means of communication. If chapter leaders are not reading or retaining the information provided in this newsletter, they are likely missing out on important information about many areas of the National Organization, not just recruitment.

The perceptions about the effectiveness of both the Plus One Challenge and the teams recruitment concept were conflicting, suggesting that either these items have not been properly explained to the chapters, the chapter women were not supported with ways to act on them, or



the expectations of the Plus One Challenge were too high and the mechanics of the teams recruitment concept too complicated for chapter members to implement.

***Were Recruitment Program Initiatives Communicated Effectively?***

The open-ended question and focus group responses revealed some members were not aware that a new national recruitment program existed or that they even had an RRC. This could be due, in part, to the turnover across semesters among the RRCs, to the lack of training that the RRCs received, and/or to the re-districting of RRC chapter assignments in the middle of the year. Over half of the respondents indicated the NRT did not help their chapter during the year, which could be simply because they did not know who the members of the team were, or that it even existed. This idea resonated in several responses to the open-ended questions and focus group questions; however, chapters who did have a relationship with the NMRC or their RRC had positive things to say about the volunteers and the national recruitment program in general. Respondents requested a recruitment listserv, which did exist during the inception of the program but was not used frequently over the course of the year. These results suggest clear communication among constituent groups within an organization is at least as important as the specific program content communicated (Schein, 1999).

***Do Recruitment Program Initiatives Consider Institutional Culture?***

Finally, there was an underlying theme that many chapters were in unique situations on their campuses and/or did not perceive their campuses to be receptive to fraternal organizations. Further, members communicated the need for programs that fit their campuses, indicating applying one program to all chapters within the National Organization without consideration for local campus culture may not be in the best interest of the collegiate women.

There was a small increase in new member intake and initiation over the course of the year, which could be due to the efforts of the NRT and the focus and commitment to recruitment from the National Organization as a whole. The attrition rates of new members for each academic year were greater than 10%, which is of concern for recruitment as well as member retention. Perhaps these numbers are reflective of a miscommunication to potential new members about the commitment involved in the act of joining a sorority (Burnett, Vaughan, & Moody, 1997).

**Recommendations**

The national recruitment program was evaluated during its inaugural year through this study. Although a program evaluation at this time has certain relevance, it would be most advantageous to evaluate this program again after it has been in existence for at least three years (Andrew Wall, personal communication, October 27, 2005). Evaluating the recruitment program after three years will allow for the entire organization to become acclimated to the program and give enough time for the changes that often occur in a program's infancy to subside.

The following recommendations are presented for the national recruitment program in the 2006-2008 biennium:

1. The methods of recruitment, retention, and training for Regional Recruitment Coordinators (RRCs) need to be more carefully spelled out. It would be advantageous to

have some type of on-site training for the women before their terms begin. In addition, the expectations for these positions need to be concrete and serve as an accountability mechanism for the RRCs.

2. Collaboration and recruitment practices training should be conducted for all members of the national staff and Council, with special attention paid to the need for collaboration with the NPC delegation and NPC area advisers on campus-related issues. Training on recruitment practices should be incorporated in all previously existing staff and adviser training programs. Communication from the NRT to chapters must be copied to those staff members who interact with chapter officers. There should be one member on the NRT that is responsible for communication with the NPC delegation and area advisers. This person should create a bi-monthly report to give to these women, so that problems are noted and addressed in a timely fashion.
3. Research on the types of campuses where the National Organization is represented followed by the development of a variety of recruitment method modules ascribed to different types of chapters should occur as soon as possible. To address this recommendation, a committee should be appointed to research each campus culture and effective recruitment practices in fraternities and sororities and other areas such as volunteer organizations, college admissions offices, employment agencies, and businesses, to find the best possible recruitment prescription for each individual group. Committee members should include members from the national staff, National Council, and collegiate women from all different types of campuses. It is further recommended that the NMRC for the 2006-2008 biennium be selected from the membership of this committee.
4. An effort should be made by the NRT to collaborate with campus officials and other NPC chapters where the undergraduate women perceive a lack of support for fraternities and sororities. This effort should be carried out on a grassroots level through letters, personal phone calls, and even campus visits.
5. Rewards, celebration, and positive reinforcement should be given for chapters in even the smallest areas of recruitment success. Rewards can be given verbally; via letter, phone call, or email; in National Organization publications; or in the form of awards, scholarships, and/or gifts. Positive reinforcement should be communicated in the training of all National Organization personnel who interact with collegiate women on any type of recruitment operations.
6. Each RRC should create supportive and positive chapter-specific action plans for groups who are targeted for additional help in the area of recruitment, with guidance from the NMRC and in collaboration with the targeted chapter. These action plans should be followed up by the RRC and evaluated for effectiveness at the end of each semester.
7. The active use of an electronic listserv should be implemented to promote communication to and among chapters and colonies. The listserv that is already in existence should be managed by the NMRC with the help of one member of the NRT. Recruitment-related communication should be sent out weekly on the listserv.
8. A task force examination of the effectiveness of the current communication practices of the National Organization should be implemented. It is recommended that this task force consist of members of the national staff, the National Council, and undergraduate chapters and colonies.



9. A task force examination relating to the retention of new members should be implemented. The task force should be lead by the National New Member Coordinator, National Membership Development Coordinators, and NMRC and should seek opinions from every area of sorority membership. In addition, an "exit" survey should be created to disperse to all chapters to give to new members who release during the time of pledging and women who release from membership after initiation.

The above recommendations should be implemented with the needed financial support from the National Organization and should be led by staff members who have both the time and desire to commit to the national recruitment program. Therefore, it is further recommended that funds be allocated to the NMRC to ensure the feasibility of these recommendations and that the organization appoint or hire dedicated, responsible, and passionate staff who have significant time to allocate to serve on the NRT.

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