

Loyola Marymount University

**Evaluating the Reputation of Sorority Life at Loyola
Marymount University**

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Abstract

This proposal identifies the need for a campus wide survey about sorority reputations at Loyola Marymount University. At LMU, there has been a significant effort to create a culture that motivates sorority members to be the best version of themselves. Each sorority is supposed to focus on creating an environment which is inclusive to all and contributes to the success of their members .By surveying the student body to determine how sorority women have been representing their organizations, LMU can have confirmation on whether there are any areas in which they could improve so that more women will want to join a sorority.

Introduction

In the collegiate environment, sororities can have a large impact on who the women that join become. Sororities serve as a way for college students to find a community on campus which gives them access to sisterhood, leadership experience, and a sense of belonging (Sorority and Fraternity Life). However, these long-standing organizations have become associated with negative characteristics such as drinking and being exclusive to students of higher economic and social classes (Atbansi). Anonymous forums and websites such as Greek rank where people can make anonymous comments about each organization and rank them in order from top-tier to bottom-tier seem to emphasize the superficiality that some have associated with sorority life (The Tiers). These websites give people a platform to express their superficial views about each sorority on their campus, and creates an extremely judgmental environment. At Temple University, students found that the site's ratings are, "incomplete, biased or irrelevant," (Strum) showing that although there are some outlets which encourage a judgemental look at sororities, there are still college students who reject these views. It is important to ensure that these organizations are a positive experience because every member will be impacted by group identity and group think. Group identity is a person's sense of belonging to the group. This is created in sororities by the combination of beauty, appearance, and class (Krueger, et al. 39). Each sorority forms their own standards of dress and appearance which signifies their belonging to a particular sorority. Additionally, sorority members will be impacted by group think which makes members of a group more motivated to think the same way, and members lose the ability to critically evaluate any other viewpoints (Feldman, 565). Group identity and group think have the potential to completely transform who a woman was before joining the sorority, so there

must be checks and balances in place to ensure that sororities are fostering an environment within their members that is not artificial and where the women are encouraged to have their own identity and opinions.

At Loyola Marymount University, there has been a significant effort to create a Panhellenic (every sorority at the university) culture that motivates members to be the best version of themselves. Each chapter is supposed to focus on creating an environment which is inclusive to all and contributes to the success of their members. Recruitment of new members should be values based, and not based on off appearance or economic and social class. Additionally, LMU has a variety of programs and policies aimed at creating a positive Panhellenic experience. One popular issue within the Panhellenic community is hazing. There have been numerous reports throughout the years detailing claims of inhumane treatment that was required to officially become a member of a sorority. LMU directly addresses and rejects this phenomenon with a National Hazing Prevention Week each year. They host events such as an open mic, a screening of Dateline NBC's "The College Fraternity Crisis," and encourage everyone to wear red as a show of support and solidarity (Tara). Panhellenic advisor Larry Daves stated that LMU does these events to encourage dialogue and create "healthier spaces where members can gain a sense of belonging for the right reasons" (Tara). Academics, service, and cultural development are also central to LMU Panhellenic mission. Each sorority member must have a GPA of at least a 2.5 to be in good standing, and for over 20 years the average GPA of sorority members has been higher than the university average. LMU sororities collectively spent over 22,000 hours on service, and raised \$149,000 for charity in 2016 (Sorority and Fraternity Spring 2016 Report). The programs that LMU Panhellenic organizes are accessible to every

student, along with end of the year reports about the money each chapter raised and how many hours they dedicated to service so it is imperative to have an understanding of if the student body recognizes that.

Literature Review

Despite the negativity surrounding Greek organizations, a study found that they are not as damaging to the college experience as previously thought. Researchers did a follow up study to one that concluded joining a sorority or fraternity had negative effects on students in their first year of joining. In the follow up study, they found that this trend is not sustained for the rest of the students time at college. The first stage of joining the sorority or fraternity (the pledging process) caused a decrease in cognitive development, but the following years of college were not negatively impacted (Pascarella et. al)

The clarification that those researchers provided is helpful because it contributes to the findings of researchers Winston and Saunders. They found that although Greek life is commonly associated with drinking, hazing, and poor academics, there are many positive benefits such as making friends, community involvement, leadership opportunities, and developing mature relationships. It concludes that joining Greek life has the potential to stimulate the personal growth of students, but only if there are policies and goals put in place to encourage this (Winston and Saunders, 15).

The current research on sorority life evaluates the negative and positive effects, but there is nothing that assesses a Greek culture like the one at LMU. Winston and Saunders proposed that Greek life can help its members grow depending on the policies and goals they put in place, and LMU has done exactly that. The Panhellenic goal at LMU is to move away from the

stereotypical culture of drinking, hazing, and poor academics, to one that helps women grow into responsible, educated women without all of the negative stereotypes. The official policies and goals that LMU Panhellenic has are already conducive to this environment, but that does not mean the campus community recognizes the changes that LMU has made to sorority life. In order for LMU to fully achieve a positive sorority life, it is necessary to research whether the student body recognizes these efforts, and can distinguish a culture that is different from other universities.

Research Design and Methods

The information needed to form conclusions about the image of sorority life at LMU can be found through a survey. A survey would be the most effective way to analyze the opinions of the student body because they are easily distributed, and also easy to synthesize their opinions. The survey will have three categories: class (economic and social), public relations, and sisterhood. The questions under each of these categories will deliberately be chosen to identify how members and non-members of sorority life at LMU view these aspects of sorority life.

For the category of class, the questions would be intended to reveal if the student body believes sororities are open to women of diverse economic and social status. A possible question could be: On a scale of 1 (very accessible) to 5 (not accessible), rate how accessible you believe sororities are to students of a lower economic class. Since LMU wants sororities to be easily accessible to all students, the ideal rating would be as close to a 1 as possible. If the data shows that most participants do not believe sororities are economically accessible to everyone, then LMU could revamp their strategies for catering to students of all economic background.

The category of public relations will be used to identify if sororities are viewed as too superficial. Sororities have events such as service days, philanthropy events, and career panels which represent how their purpose on campus is to be charitable and also help their members achieve their career goals after graduation. However, it is a common stereotype that sororities only focus on superficial aspects, such as social media and appearance, over more genuine aspects such as philanthropy and academics to form their public image. The questions for this category would require careful wording and a thorough amount for each subcategory (philanthropy, academics, service, etc.). Some example questions to evaluate if campus believes sororities care about the subcategory of philanthropy are:

- On a scale of 1(extremely passionate) to 5(disinterested), how passionate have the sorority women you encountered been about philanthropy?
- On a scale of 1(very knowledgeable) to 5 (not knowledgeable), how knowledgeable were the women about their chosen philanthropy?
- Please write your best guess for the philanthropy associated with each sorority on campus.

These three questions are comprehensive enough to determine if philanthropy has been effectively advertised to the student body. Additionally, it also will reveal if sorority members are passionate about their philanthropies and if certain organizations have been more effective at associating themselves with philanthropy. Questions like these will show Panhellenic if they have been successful or unsuccessful at building an image that shows genuine concern for academics, philanthropy, and service.

The sisterhood category will determine if the sororities on campus have shown that their members form genuine friendships and are kind to all. One of the main purposes of sororities is to have a group of girls that will support each other always and become close friends. The student body should be aware of this because otherwise people who are struggling socially or desire to form close connections with people will not consider that joining a sorority may be helpful to them. An example of a line of questioning for this category is:

- Do the sorority women on campus seem to enjoy spending time together?
- Do you ever notice sorority women hanging out together on campus?
- Would you consider the sororities on campus as a way to form genuine friendships?
- Do you believe that certain sororities are better at creating genuine friendships than others? If so, please rank them in order from 'most genuine friendships' to 'least genuine friendships.'

Questions like these will be helpful in determining if sororities effectively show that they help foster relationships.

To evaluate the data from the surveys, it is necessary to use statistics. The participants answer to each question will be inserted into a spreadsheet, and then each type of question will be handled differently. For the questions that required a ranking on a scale of 1 to 5, a tally will be made for how many times the chosen answer was 1, 2, 3, 4, or 5. Then, the number that was chosen the most can be considered the majority opinion. For questions that ask for each sorority to be ranked in order, there can be a tally made for how many times the sorority was ranked as first, second, third, etc. Then, the tally number can be converted into a percentage, and this will

tell what percentage of the participants ranked the sorority in a specific place. These percentages will be enough information for each sorority to understand if they have an excellent, average, or bad reputation for that specific question. There is a lot of data to analyze and sort through, so depending on the number of participants I anticipate that it could take around two to four weeks to finish. Ideally, around 40% of the student population would complete the survey in order to have a representative sample size. Sorority and Fraternity members make up around 25% of the student population, so the rest should be unaffiliated LMU students. The data could potentially be very different for Greek life members and non-Greek life members. To determine if this causes a significant difference, their data will have to be evaluated separately. At the beginning of the survey, each participant will have to specify if they are involved in Greek life.

Additionally, there is no extra cost to create the survey because of online survey makers, so the only budget need will be for time spent analyzing the data. Students involved in Greek life should still take the survey because every member is not heavily involved. Although LMU may have certain goals for sorority life, that does not mean that every sorority member agrees with or experiences LMU's expectations for sorority life.

By implementing a campus wide survey on whether the student body agrees that LMU sorority life has effectively distanced itself from common negative characteristics, it will give LMU direction on whether their efforts are successful or if they should take a new approach. It has been proven that joining a sorority is beneficial to the undergraduate experience (Pascarella), and LMU Panhellenic's work to disestablish the negative connotation associated with their organizations should be recognized by the student body, otherwise their efforts are not as

impactful. The results of the survey will become an article, and it will be given to the LMU Greek Life office so that it can be distributed to members of Greek life and their advisors.

Discussion

This research will specifically be helpful to LMU. LMU Panhellenic prides itself on social media and around campus about the characteristics that make them unique from other universities. There is a zero tolerance hazing policy that every chapter must follow, and it is actually enforced which is different from other universities where hazing is still prevalent. Additionally, LMU Panhellenic has service days which every organization participates in, and they encourage academic excellence through Order of Omega (an Honors society) and through a new program which connects the community with people in their major so they can form study groups or tutor each other. Despite the efforts LMU has put into creating a unique sorority experience, there is still a stigma surrounding them, because of the national reputation sororities have. By surveying the student body to determine how sorority women have been representing their organizations, LMU can have confirmation on whether there are any areas in which they could improve. Then, efforts can be geared towards correcting those particular weak spots. In turn, it is likely that more students will consider joining a sorority. This gives more women access to a smaller community that will provide them with leadership experience, academic help, and programs to support their personal growth.

Conclusion

There needs to be a study done at LMU to determine the reputation of sorority life on campus. LMU Panhellenic has increased their efforts to make sororities be organizations that encourage the personal growth of its members, so this goal cannot be completed unless the

student body recognizes that sororities are have more to offer than the negative characteristics that are commonly associated with them. The best way to determine this is through a campus wide survey because they are an easy way to collect people's opinions and analyze them. They will also be easy to distribute digitally throughout the student body because of social media. The results from the survey will offer LMU a sense of direction when planning new events and policies, because they will have proof of their strong and weak points. Thus, they can focus on improving the areas that require more attention. Overall, this study is necessary because LMU Panhellenic must know what reputation they have on campus in order to know if there is more they could to to have a positive relationship with the student body.

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