

## **Two Year vs. Four Year: What is the true impact of Fraternity and Sorority Life?**

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Since the 1800's, fraternal organizations have continued to interest college students, opening a gateway of leadership and networking to their members. However, fraternity and sorority membership is commonly thought of as an opportunity only for students who attend four-year colleges or universities. Many overlook the impact fraternity and sorority life can have on students at two-year colleges. There appears to be no real fraternal community at these institutions. However, many community colleges offer service-oriented and/or honor societies with many similar characteristics as traditional fraternities or sororities. It may appear the fraternity/sorority experience is not alive at community colleges, but we would claim the impact and growth provided by fraternal organizations is alive and well at many community colleges.

There is much for students to gain through membership in a fraternity or sorority: connections, opportunities for involvement, belonging, leadership skills, opportunities to interact with others who have differing perspectives, personal and professional development, and more. According to Glass (2012), "what makes fraternity and sorority membership rewarding is that members receive the unique opportunity to interact with and lead their peers."

The characteristics and priorities of community college students may differ, but the overall need to grow and develop personally and professionally still exists. Many students who choose to attend community colleges come from a different background than a traditional student who entered a four-year institution upon graduation from high school. Some work multiple jobs to make ends meet, raise children, or have chosen to start their collegiate career after many years of being in the workforce. Despite their circumstances, community college students are just as capable of being leaders as their counterparts at four-year institutions.

Furthermore, offering such impactful experiences at community colleges can provide a way to reach many of our underserved student populations. Among the more than 1,100 U.S. public community colleges, Blacks and Latinos made up roughly 35 percent of total enrollment in 2012, while comprising just 24 percent of undergraduates in public four-year colleges and universities (Roach, 2014). President Obama has clearly outlined his intentions to focus on the community college student population as the potential leaders of the future. We must "engage community colleges as the higher education sector most entrusted to address the nation's changing demographics" (Roach, 2014). As our governmental leaders call for allocating time and resources to support this student population, we must respond.

The options offered to community college students focus on civically minded and honor fraternal organizations. Even with this limited offering, students can still find ways to challenge their thinking, grow their boundaries of acceptance, and help improve their surroundings. The leadership opportunities offered in these organizations are of great benefit to these students, just as they are in traditional organizations on four-year colleges. Often times, opportunities arise where members who do not get along find themselves in situations where they must to work together — skills that are vital in the post-college work force.

As David Stollman said of fraternity and sorority membership, "you get the opportunity to fail miserably and have brothers and sisters that love you and care for you pick you up and dust you off and challenge you to do it again" (Glass, 2012). The bonds and support from fraternities and sororities are alive and

well in the civic and honor fraternal organizations found at community colleges. These levels of support are the backbone of what being in a fraternity and sorority is all about. The assurance of knowing there are others there to support you, regardless of the circumstance; and are ready to lend a hand when you need it, is the true foundation of brotherhood and sisterhood. Keeping in mind the demographics of community colleges, that support system may be the vital piece in helping these students be successful and keeping their “dreams alive” to advance themselves in receiving their degree.

### References

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