

# ARE FRATERNITIES AND SORORITIES TEACHING THE VALUE OF COMMUNITY SERVICE

– Sally Vestal

The U.S. Department of Education estimates during the 1999-2000 academic year more than five million college students gave 1,166,889,241 hours of their time to volunteer service. The monetary value of this time is estimated to be over **17.6 billion dollars** (Campus Cares, 2001).

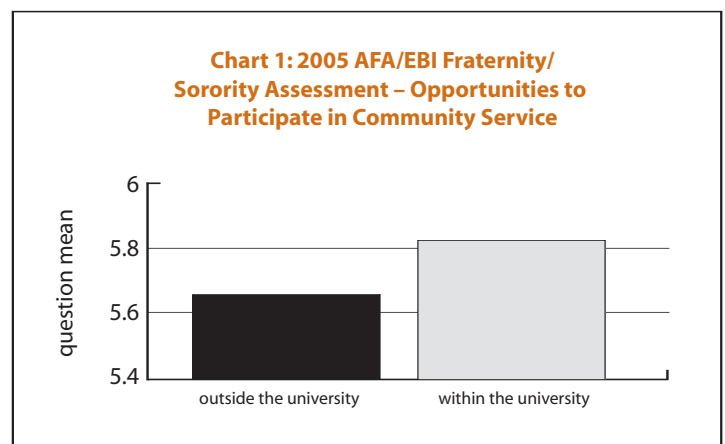
College students who perform volunteer work are more likely to attend graduate school, donate to their alma mater, volunteer in their community after college, and socialize with individuals from different backgrounds. In the short term, volunteering while in college has a positive influence on a student's academic development and influences time spent on classwork, problem-solving skills, and grades earned. Volunteering also has a positive affect on the student's social development by increasing life skills such as leadership, self-confidence, and conflict resolution (Campus Cares, n.d.).

Fraternities and sororities espouse service and volunteerism as an essential component of the experience of members, but are these organizations teaching members the value of community service? Data from the AFA/EBI Fraternity/Sorority Assessment can aid in answering this question.

**Overview of instrument:** The AFA/EBI Fraternity/Sorority Assessment has 77 perception questions that utilize a seven-point Likert scale. The number one represents "very dissatisfied" and seven represents "very satisfied." The perception questions are used to comprise 15 factors (or constructs).

A factor is a grouping of statistically related questions that describes a broad concept more completely than just asking a single question. Fourteen of these factors are independent variables that, together, define overall program effectiveness, the dependent fifteenth factor. There are also 14 categorical questions (e.g. gender, ethnicity, and class standing) asked of each respondent. In 2005, 27 colleges and universities participated in the assessment and submitted 15,600 responses from fraternity and sorority members.

**Aggregate Results: (An analysis of responses from all participating institutions.)** One of the fourteen independent factors is Opportunities to Participate in Community Service. The factor is composed of two questions that ask the degree to which the fraternity/sorority provided opportunities to participate in community service activities. While both questions are high performing, Chart 1 reveals members perceived there were more opportunities within the college/university than outside the college. The Opportunities to Participate in Community Service factor was one of the higher performing factors on the assessment. Only one of the fourteen independent factors, Interpersonal Relationships, had a higher mean than Opportunities to Participate in Community Service.



While the Opportunities to Participate in Community Service factor is a top performing factor, it is only a minor predictor of overall program effectiveness. In other words, providing opportunities to participate in community service has little impact on member perception of the effectiveness of the fraternity/sorority experience. With this in mind, it can be inferred that *providing opportunities for volunteerism is not the same as teaching the value*. It is necessary to search further to discover if fraternities and sororities are teaching this value to their members.

In addition to the Opportunities to Participate in Community Service factor, there are two other questions on the assessment focusing on issues related to community service. The first addresses the meaningfulness of the community service opportunities that are provided. Chart 2 illustrates over half of the members were moderately to very satisfied with the meaningfulness of the community service opportunities.

Chart 2 shows over half of the respondents reported the fraternity/sorority experience heavily contributed (responded 6 or 7 on a 7 point scale) to their commitment to community service. This indicates that more than half of respondents directly connected their membership in a fraternity or sorority to their current commitment to community service.

**Chart 2: 2005 AFA/EBI Fraternity/Sorority Assessment**

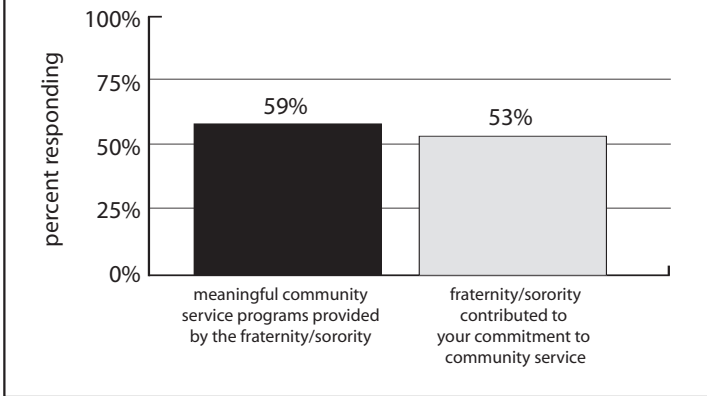
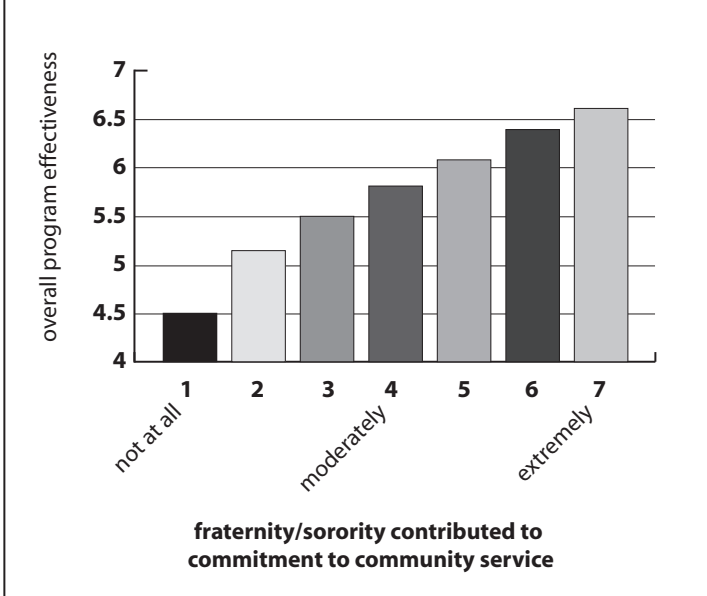


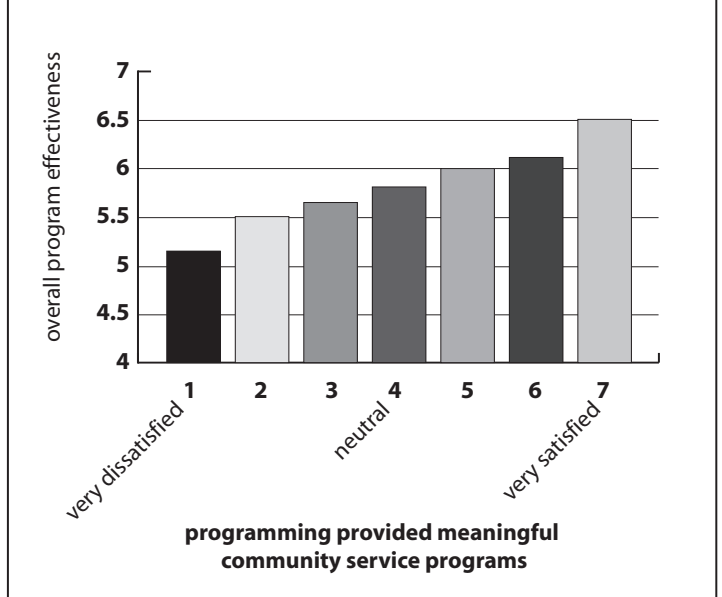
Chart 3 takes a closer look at the second question, “To what degree has your fraternity/sorority experience contributed to your commitment to community service?” Members who reported an extreme contribution to their commitment on this question also perceived the overall fraternity/sorority experience to be very effective with a factor mean of 6.65. Conversely, those members that indicated the fraternity/sorority did not make a contribution to their commitment to community service, responded less favorably on the overall effectiveness factor. The aggregate factor mean for this group of members was 4.53. As the chart shows, members who experienced an increased commitment to community service perceived the fraternity/sorority experience as more effective.

**Chart 3: 2005 AFA/EBI Fraternity/Sorority Assessment**



Similarly, members who responded that the campus fraternity/sorority experience did not provide meaningful volunteer opportunities, perceived the overall fraternity/sorority experience to be less effective, while members who were very satisfied with the meaningfulness of the community service opportunities provided indicated that the overall fraternity/sorority program is more effective as seen in Chart 4.

**Chart 4: 2005 AFA/EBI Fraternity/Sorority Assessment**



**Summary:** Member perceptions on the community service factor indicate they are very pleased with the community service opportunities the fraternity or sorority provides. Members are satisfied with the level of meaningfulness of service programs provided and report their fraternity/sorority experience contributes to their commitment to community service. Those who indicated the fraternity/sorority increased their level of commitment to community service also perceived the overall fraternity/sorority program as more effective. Given the apparent long and short-term benefits volunteer work has on college students, fraternities and sororities should be congratulated for imparting this value to their members. Fraternities and sororities with lower than average performance may be able to strengthen the quality of, and commitment to, community service by enlisting assistance from other university groups that commonly spearhead volunteer efforts.

For more information on this assessment or how your institution can become involved, please contact:

**Dave Butler**, Project Director  
302-286-0230 | Dave@webebi.com

EBI assessments are also available for college housing, college union/student centers, first-year initiative programs and many academic areas in higher education. Please visit <http://www.webebi.com/> for more information.

– Sally Vestal is the Production Manager for Educational Benchmarking, Inc.

**REFERENCES**

Campus Cares: Solutions for Stronger Communities (n.d.). Retrieved June 19, 2006, from <http://www.campuscares.org/>.

Campus Cares: Solutions for Stronger Communities (2001). *National statistics on the community engagement of college and university students*. Retrieved June 19, 2006, from <http://www.campuscares.org/resources/engagement.html>.