

“Napa Valley College Transfer Students are Missing Out on Greek Life.”

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### *Abstract*

This study poses the question, "are Community College Transfer Students joining Greek Life?" To answer the question research was conducted on the transfer experience and Greek Life. A handful of questions were developed and a large amount of energy went into forming a focus group. The focus group was a small number of students who had transferred from Napa Valley College and joined Greek Life and a small number who did not. The results concluded that the main factors for joining Greek life and making it to the focus group were available time, travel distance and the amount of information they received on Greek Life.

### *Introduction*

The intention of this research project was to conduct a qualitative study on the subgroup of Community College Transfer Students who join the Greek Life system. This report will review the themes found in the interviews including individual student responses. This report will include the results of the study and if there is an answer to the research question. The report will conclude with recommendations for programs and services at Napa Valley College and four-year universities represented in the study. Attached to the report as Appendix A is the executive summary.

### *Background*

Organizing a transfer student focus group of six was more challenging than predicted. Transfer centers exist at community colleges but not as frequent at four-year universities. Due to the time constraints of the study, students were recruited from the Napa Valley College Student Government and Student Support Services alumni list. The students who volunteered to participate either lived at least forty minutes away from their college, worked

and went to school full time, or had no transportation to get to the focus group. There were two attempts to gather four out of six students to meet in person and conduct a focus group. Each time there was an additional student scheduled to take notes and record the interviews with an IPOD recorder. The first time, the focus group was canceled due to students unable to make it at the last minute. The second time only one student showed. Finally, the research was conducted through individual interviews, each recorded with an IPOD recorder and then transcribed. Three interviews were done in person, one over the phone and two over Email.

### *Participants*

The final participants in the study were a 41 year old, African American female, who attended Mills College and will soon join Delta Sigma Theta Alumni Chapter. She was coded as Student A. Student B was coded for a 26 year old Caucasian/Mexican American male, who attend University of California at Berkeley and tried to join Gamma Zeta Alpha. Student C was coded for a 20 year old Palestinian American female, who currently attends U.C. Davis and has not joined a Greek sorority. Student D was coded for a 21 year old Mexican American male, who currently attends Sonoma State University and has not joined a Greek fraternity. Student E was coded for a 24 year old Caucasian male, who attended San Francisco State University and joined Pi Kappa Phi. The final student who was coded Student F was a 21 year old Mexican American male, who currently attends University of California at Berkeley and joined Lambda Chi Alpha. Student A, C and D were interviewed in person. Student B was interviewed over the phone. Student E and F were interviewed over Email. The interviews were then transcribed and analyzed for common themes. Each student received a \$7.00 Starbucks gift card as an incentive to participate in the research study.

*Themes*

The interviews provided a variety of common themes. One theme was the lack of information about Greek Life given at transfer orientations and once they started attending the university. Student C, who is a female currently attending U.C. Davis, described how she was very interested in joining Greek life before she transferred but never was orientated about the differences. She described the experience as, “I don’t remember anything about Greek life at all at orientation. The Greek life stuff, there are signs around campus saying pledge with Greek letters but you don’t know if they are a sorority or fraternity.”

When Student D, a male, who is currently attending Sonoma State University, was asked if he heard about Greek Life at his transfer orientation, his said, “a lot of information on student government was provided. Greek life, I think it was just mention, but not really promoted. They focus more on student government, where their officers were, what kind of services they provided and how to get involved. With Greek life it was only mention that they only have so many fraternities.” Student B, a male student who attended U.C. Berkeley, when he was asked if he heard about Greek life at his transfer orientation he said, “I can’t remember. They mainly talked about the resources rather than stuff about Greek Life.” These interviews showed that the lack of information about Greek Life at orientations can affected the interest students might have towards Greek Life.

Another common theme was their opinion of the role of Greek Life on a college campus. All of the students interviewed mentioned either social or community in their answer. Student A, a female from Mills College described the role of Greek life as “it is to be associated with a special community of people who are motivated by the same thing. I think it builds friendships and bonds that can go beyond college life. It can be strength for someone

who does not know how to be involved with others. They have a sister. Once you are part of Greek Life, that person is your sister. You build bonds of sisterhood. I think that it is the positive part.” Student E, who attends San Francisco State University, described the role of Greek Life as “Essential. The amount of networking and integration I received from joining was detrimental to my success. It was nothing but mind expanding and positive.” Student F who attends U.C. Berkeley and did complete the rush process described the role of Greek Life as “mostly a social role. Greek life often revolves around social functions and activities. It also serves students to create networks and social capital. Since I was a member for only one semester I have not been very influenced by the system.”

The interviews also produced the common theme that Napa Valley College has a very positive impact on the transfer experience. When the students were asked to describe how Napa Valley College prepared them to transferred, Student B, Student D and Student E all mentioned how academically prepared they were. Student B, a male who graduated from U.C. Berkeley, spring 2005 said that Napa Valley College, “really introduced me to the fat bureaucracy of the higher education institution. They helped me navigate. I am not saying they held my hand and walk me through it. They helped me with meeting up with counselors, setting up an education plan. They prepared me. There was a very good outreach program such as Student Support Services.”

Student D who recently transferred to Sonoma State University, described his transfer preparation at Napa Valley College as, “I think first off it gave me a huge incentive to move on. Napa prepared me in the sense that they have outstanding professors who absolutely supported me in moving on in my academics. And the services are very well and allocating time to the student. For example the counseling office. The counselors would always meet

with me. I never had a problem scheduling an appointment with a counselor. The services in general are fantastic especially Student Services.”

### *Results*

The overall research question was, “are Community College Transfer Students joining Greek Life? The four main research questions used to help answer the larger question were:

1. When a community college student transfers to the University, are they informed and empowered to join Greek Life?
2. At the University level, do Greek Life organizations make an effort to recruit Transfer Students?
3. Does Greek Life interests Transfer Students?
4. Are Transfer Students receiving appropriate orientations and services that enhance their college experience?

The results regarding the question, “when a community college student transfers to the University, are they informed and empowered to join Greek Life?” showed that at University transfer orientations, students are being oriented in registration, degree requirements, and general student services but not Greek Life. Only the students who attended U.C. Berkeley received information about Greek Life at their orientation. Regarding the question, “at the University level, do Greek Life organizations make an effort to recruit Transfer Students?” the interviews showed that Greek students did not make a special effort to recruit Transfer Students. The students interviewed described that to be recruited by a sorority or fraternity; students have to make an effort to attend the Greek’s party and then wait to be asked back. Regarding the question, “does Greek Life interests Transfer Students?” All of the students interviewed showed an interest in Greek Life. Half of the

group even thought that Greek Life could exist at a community college. Ironically, it was the students who did join Greek Life that felt Greek Life would succeed more at the four-year level than at a community college. Their reasons were Greeks have access to students who live on-campus.

The individual interviews did produce results to the question, “are Transfer Students receiving appropriate orientations and services that enhance their college experience?” The research showed that Transfer Students from Napa Valley College are receiving appropriate orientations and services that enhance their college experience. Napa Valley College also provided excellent opportunities for students to enhance their ability to learn and study.

### *Recommendations*

For Napa Valley College I recommend the Transfer Center and Student Support Services offer workshops about Greek Life. The workshop could be taught by Greek staff from a local university. The workshop could include definitions of Greek Letters, the differences between fraternities and sororities, and the process of how to join. Currently, the Transfer Center organizes annual Transfer Days. I recommend they included information tables on student life, especially Greek life at the University. Currently at Napa Valley College, community college students are constantly informed about transfer agreements and what classes they need to take to transfer. However, they hardly hear about what they can do outside the classroom. Often times, a university campus can offer college students more than a community college campus. For example, university campuses have recreation centers, student unions and on-campus living. I recommend the Transfer Center work more with the Student Life department to build a relationship with a local Greek Life office and invite fraternities and sororities to the campus to share how Greek Life is available to them once

they transferred. For some students, knowing about Greek Life might be the motivation they need to do well in their classes and transfer.

The students from the focus group recommended that University Transfer Orientation services do not assume that Transfer Students are not interested in Student Life. The students recommend they include brochures about Greek Life services, Student Clubs and Organizations and other campus activities. I encourage Greek Life services to make more of an effort to reach out to Transfer Students and provide more detailed information about joining Greek Life. For example, Universities could add a link to Student Life and Greek Life web sites from the University Prospective Transfer Student section of their campus web site. Universities would be surprised how many Transfer Students out there would love to be involved. Universities would also be happy to know for retention and F.T.E. purposes that Transfer Students are most likely to attend their school as a full-time student and apply for Financial Aid. All the students in the focus group attended their four-year university full-time and received Financial Aid and a scholarship.

An important recommendation for future researchers of this subject, this focus group lacked the input from non-transfer fraternity and sorority members who are the ones who do the recruiting. I recommend, the next time this kind of focus group is organized, include students who organize the Greek Rush process. These students would be able to answer the research questions regarding recruitment and how serious fraternity and sorority groups are about inviting Transfer Student to join the fraternity or sorority.

### *Conclusion*

As I look back at this qualitative study, what I would differently is connected with an active Transfer Center or Transfer services at one of the local universities and recruited

students from only one college. Next time, I would organize a focus group of students who all attended the same transfer orientation and joined Greek Life.

One that thing did work for this qualitative study was the excellent feedback Napa Valley College received about their transfer efforts. The results of this study showed that Napa Valley College Transfer Students feel well prepared, are successful at the university level academically, and view their time at Napa Valley College as a positive one. The literature review and interviews showed that Greek life offers college students a unique and social college experience. In conclusion, Community College Transfer Students add diversity in thought and life experience to University campuses and they would appreciate being informed and invited to join Greek Life.

## Appendix A

### Executive Summary

Type of research study was qualitative. The researcher was Victoria Estrella, Masters in Education candidate in the College of Student Affairs program at Azusa Pacific University. She also was the Coordinator of Student Life at Napa Valle College. The time period of the qualitative study was March 1, 2007 to April 7, 2007. The research question was, “Are Community College Transfer Students joining Greek Life?” The focus group was six students who transferred from Napa Valley College, CA. Student A, was a 41 year old, African American female, who attended Mills College and will soon join Delta Sigma Theta Alumni Chapter. Student B was a 26 year old Caucasian/Mexican American male, who attended University of California at Berkeley and tried to join Gamma Zeta Alpha. Student C was a 20 year old Palestinian American female, who currently attends U.C. Davis and has not joined a Greek sorority. Student D was a 21 year old Mexican American male, who currently attends Sonoma State University and has not joined a Greek fraternity. Student E was a 24 year old Caucasian male, who attended San Francisco State University and joined Pi Kappa Phi. Student F was a 21 year old Mexican American male, who currently attends University of California at Berkeley and joined Lambda Chi Alpha.

The method of research was a literature review on two subgroups; Community College Transfer Students and Greek Life. The interview questions were developed from the literature review and the researcher’s own observation of Napa Valley College transfer services and interest in University transfer orientations. There were two attempts to form a focus group. Due to time constraints, distance, and student work and school schedules, the focus group turned into individual interviews. Three interviews were done in person, one

over the phone and two through email. Each interview lasted between twenty to thirty minutes.

The answers were that some Community College Transfer Students are mostly likely do join Greek Life if they knew about Greek Life prior to attending, had a family member involved in Greek Life, or lived on campus. The recommendations that evolved from the interviews were for Napa Valley College Transfer Center to start including information about Greek Life at their annual Transfer Day. For Napa Valley College Transfer Center and Student Support Services to work with the department of Student Life to develop a relationship with at least one local university's Greek Services with the intent that workshops about Greek Life are organized and presented at Napa Valley College. The recommendation for the University campuses is to include more information about Greek Life and student clubs and organizations at their transfer orientations.