Fraternal Organizations and Diversity

2010 Report

By members of
The Millennial Student Project

Authors

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Executive Summary

In the fall of 2005, the division of Student Affairs began a four-year project called The Millennial Student Project. The purpose of this project was to assess student attitudes regarding diversity, beginning with first time-freshmen. Over the course of the project (2005-2009), the sample was expanded to include comparison cohorts and to test additional survey items as the survey instrument was further developed and revised.

In fall 2009, a partnership was formed between members of The Millennial Student Project research team and Student Affairs staff working within programs serving students involved in fraternities and sororities in the Center for Student Involvement and Leadership. The goal was to administer the survey to a cohort of students involved in fraternities and sororities and a cohort of students not involved in these programs, comparing the perceptions and experiences of these students with regard to diversity. The purpose of this report is to detail the assessment completed in 2009-2010, sharing findings and implications for practice.

Of the 7,899 students invited to participate in this survey, a total of 567 students responded (7.2% response rate) with 229 students from fraternities and sororities and 338 students who were not affiliated with these programs.

This assessment sought to answer the following questions: in what ways do students affiliated with fraternal organizations differ demographically from students in a general campus community, and what differences exist between these groups of students with regard to perspectives on privilege and social justice? Because results are based on self-reported data and a small sample, findings are limited to this study and should not be generalized. The following is a summary for major areas of focus for this report.

Demographic Differences: Respondents affiliated with fraternal organizations and respondents not affiliated with these organizations seemed to differ in multiple ways. Affiliated respondents seemed to be more involved in the campus community, to come from less diverse backgrounds and communities, and to have a higher socioeconomic status.

Differences related to Privilege: In this report, the term "privilege" includes more than socio-economic advantages one individual might have over another—it includes things such as being from an ethnic majority, or having the time and resources to be involved in extracurricular activities. Affiliated respondents seemed to be more privileged than non-affiliated respondents across these types of measures.

Differences related to Social Justice: To be aware of social justice is more than an openness to diversity—it is to be aware of subtle issues related to privilege and discrimination. While affiliated respondents viewed their organizations as being very open to diversity, they seemed to be less social justice minded on issues related to privilege than non-affiliated respondents.

Background

Institutions of higher education continue to become more diverse with regard to personal and cultural characteristics such as race and ethnicity, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, and ability. This increase in diversity underscores the need for colleges and universities to expand the range of services they offer to students and the need to educate students about social justice, providing information about how privilege and discrimination affect fairness and equity in society, thereby preparing them for interactions in a diverse, globalized society (Sax 2008; Cantor, 2008; Boschini & Thompson, 1998). In contrast, social fraternal organizations have remained largely homogenous in that traditional social fraternities and sororities are primarily Caucasian, with the exception historically African American fraternities and sororities and new fraternal organizations that serve other ethnic minorities or lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, transgender, and questioning (LGBTQ) students (Gregory, 2003). These organizations were founded in part as a response to underrepresented students not being welcomed into traditional fraternities and sororities, yet although these new organizations provide social outlets similar to those provided by traditional fraternal organizations (Gregory, 2003), these students remain marginalized within the larger campus and fraternal community and may feel alienated (Boschini & Thompson, 1998).

 An important role for institutions of higher education is to facilitate critical thinking and student development (Sax, 2008; Nuss, 2003). Gaining exposure to diverse environments and perspectives through attending racial/cultural workshops, having diverse social experiences, engaging in volunteer activities, and interacting with faculty, encourages this kind of development (Sax, 2008). Affiliation with traditional, more homogenous fraternal organizations is associated with lower levels of critical thinking skills, and discourages interest in improving race relations, resulting in less openness to diversity, regardless of gender (Sax, 2008; Pascarella and Terenzini, 2005; Gregory, 2003; Pascarella, Edison, Nora, Hagedorn, and Terenzini, 1996).

Fraternities and sororities were founded on the principles of friendship, scholarship, leadership, rectitude, and service, and diverse memberships in fraternal organizations expand the learning opportunities among members of different cultures and backgrounds (Boschini & Thompson, 1998). Gregory (2003) states that one value in fraternal organizations is community involvement through service, and as a result, alumni/ae of fraternal organizations tend to be more involved in their communities after graduation, with the potential to contribute social capital to their communities. It is then critical for students involved in fraternal organizations to be educated about social justice so they can be successful in a multicultural world and use their influence to educate others (Gregory, 2003). If they plan to remain viable and relevant, fraternal organizations and institutions of higher education must collaborate to build inclusive learning communities through social justice education, closing gaps between what is espoused and the reality of what is enacted with regard to diversity (Boschini & Thompson, 1998).

This assessment seeks to answer the following questions: in what ways do students affiliated with fraternal organizations differ demographically from students in a general campus community, and what differences exist between these groups of students with regard to perspectives on privilege and social justice?

Methodology

This paper discusses data from a cohort at The University of Arizona, which included respondents involved in social fraternal organizations (including fraternities and sororities) and respondents who were not involved in social fraternal organizations. Because some fraternal organizations do not use Greek letters to identify themselves (Gregory, 2003), the term "Greek" is avoided in this paper. Instead, the term "affiliated" is used for respondents involved in social fraternal organizations, and "non-affiliated" is used to describe respondents not associated with these organizations. Data was collected from an online survey that employed both quantitative (short answer and Likert scale) and qualitative (open-ended) measures. Items for this iteration of the survey were derived from Levine-Donnerstein, Biely, Champion, Trombetta, Chapman, & Lenton (1997, 2000); Bogardus (1933); Nicolazzo & Hoefle (2009); and the Millennial Student Project (2005-2009).

All 3,859 students affiliated with a fraternal organization (first-year through senior) were invited to participate. The total cohort of 4,040 invited non-affiliated students included 50% who identified as members of an ethnic minority; students of color were oversampled due to the fact that both the campus and fraternal communities are predominantly White. A total of 567 students responded (7.2% response rate) with 229 affiliated respondents and 338 non-affiliated. At the 95 percent confidence level, the margin of error for this sample of 567 students is plus or minus 4 percent. Student Affairs Assessment and Research attempts to include samples valid at the 95 percent confidence level with a margin of error of plus or minus 2-3 percent. Every effort was made to encourage participation in this study, however, participation was voluntary, and sample sizes are affected by this.

There are several limitations that should be noted for this assessment. Results are based on self-reported data at a single institution and a small sample, and those respondents who chose to participate may be different from those who declined, particularly since the topic is politically charged. Of those who answered the survey, the majority were female, indicating that perspectives from males may not be fully represented. In addition, some demographic data was aggregated. Though the respondents labeled as "ethnic minorities" or "LGBTQ" constitute groups that are far from homogeneous, the relatively small sample sizes for more distinct minority groups were too small for results to be statistically significant. Therefore, aggregation by White/Non-White and Heterosexual/LGBTQ was necessary.

Findings

Demographic Differences

Affiliated and non-affiliated respondent cohorts seemed to differ demographically, as illustrated in the tables and graphs below. Table 1 and Graph 1 show how respondents identify demographically with regard to measures such as ethnicity and gender, Table 2 and Graph 2 compare levels of student involvement between affiliated and non-affiliated respondents, and Table 3 and Graph 3 show differences in areas related to socioeconomic status.

Table 1: Demographic Identification of Affiliated and Non-Affiliated Cohorts

Demographic Characteristic	Percent of Affiliated Cohort	Percent of Non-Affiliated Cohort
Ethnicity	67.5% White	51.1% White
Gender	71.3% Female	62.1% Female
Disabled (includes Learning Disabilities)	15.8% with a Disability	12.4% with a Disability
Sexual Orientation	93.6% Heterosexual	92.0% Heterosexual
Class Level	30.9% Freshmen	26.8% Freshmen
Resident	51.7% In-State Student	69.4% In-State Student
Political Affiliation	42.4% Republican	23.1% Republican

Graph 1: Demographic Identification of Affiliated and Non-Affiliated Cohorts
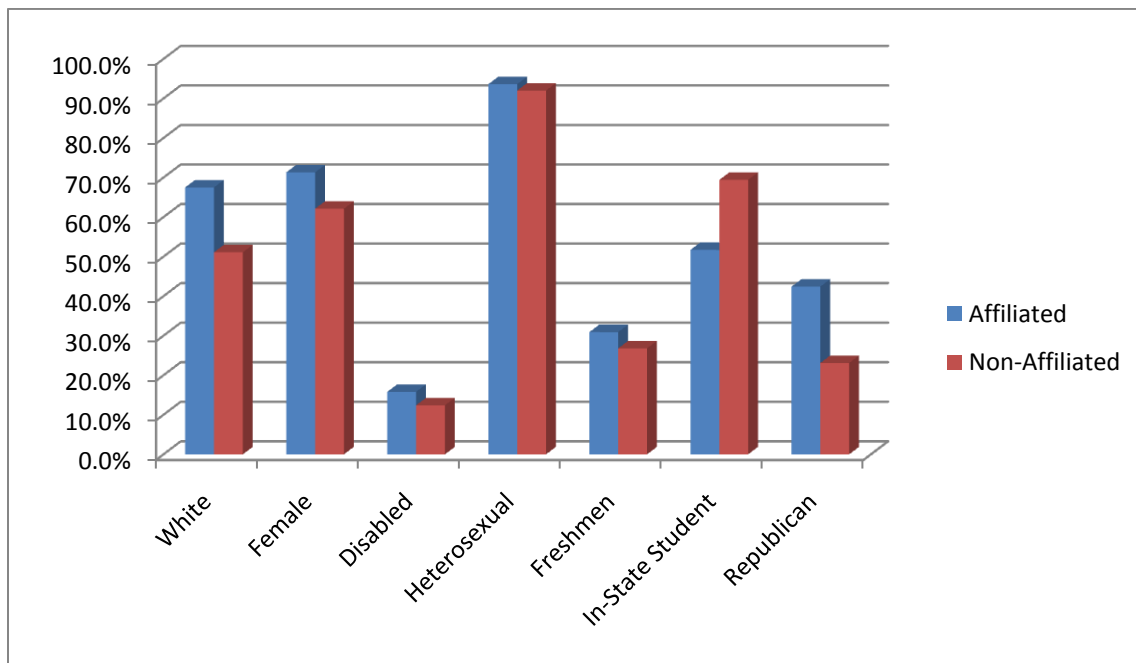
Table 2: Student Involvement of Affiliated and Non-Affiliated Cohorts

Areas Indicating Student Involvement	Percent of Affiliated Cohort	Percent of Non-Affiliated Cohort
Athletic Affiliation	12.7% Athletes	6.8% Athletes
Student Clubs	40.6% Involved	25.7% Involved
Pride Alliance (LGBTQ Club)	4.4% Involved	0.9% Involved

Graph 2: Student Involvement of Affiliated and Non-Affiliated Cohorts
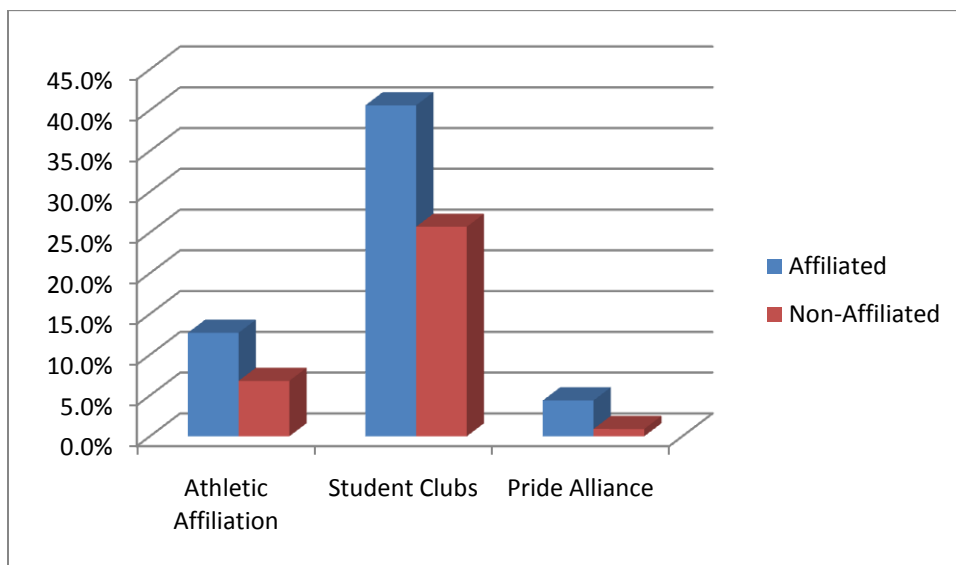

Table 3: Socioeconomic Status of Affiliated and Non-Affiliated Cohorts

Areas Indicating Socioeconomic Status	Percent of Affiliated Cohort	Percent of Non-Affiliated Cohort
Employed on Campus	10.5% Employed	10.1% Employed
Employed off Campus	13.5% Employed	25.7% Employed
No Four-Year Degree for Guardian(s)	23.9% First Generation Student	43.2% First Generation Student
Home Neighborhood 50% or More Ethnic Minority	14.9% Diverse Neighborhood	32.0% Diverse Neighborhood
Socioeconomic Class	57.5% Upper Middle-Upper Class	30.8% Upper Middle-Upper Class
Family Income	43.2% Above $100K	24.1% Above $100K
Grant Aid	21.8% Received Grants	42.0% Received Grants

Table 3: Socioeconomic Status of Affiliated and Non-Affiliated Cohorts
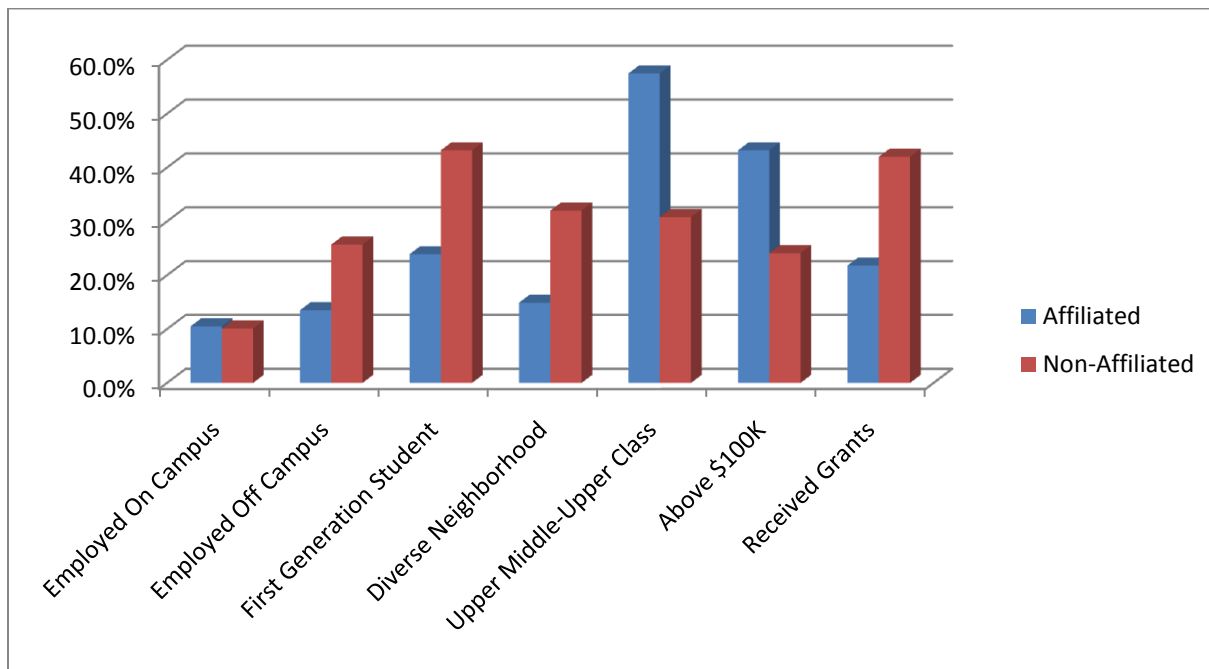
Privilege

In this assessment, privilege is defined as something that gives one individual an advantage over another, and can include social, cultural, physical, and economic advantages, such as being a member of an ethnic majority or having a financial advantage and not needing to work as many hours or not needing to take out a loan. Respondents affiliated with campus fraternal organizations seemed to be more privileged in a number of ways. A higher percentage reported (as indicated in the above tables and graphs): being White, being involved in extracurricular activities, not being employed off campus, being from out-of-state, having a parent or guardian with a four-year degree, coming from less ethnically diverse neighborhoods, and coming from families with a higher income and socioeconomic level. The following table illustrates the relationship between being affiliated with a fraternal organization and each item, and indicates the level of significance for those survey items that were found to be statistically significant in a Chi Square Analysis, a tool for analysis which tests for any difference between the study groups in the proportions of each item being tested.

Table 4: Demographic Characteristics for Fraternally Affiliated Respondents Indicating Greater Privilege and Access to Resources

Demographic Variable	Level of Significance
More likely to identify as White.	$p < .001$
More likely to identify as female.	$p < .05$
More likely to identify as an athlete.	$p < .05$
More likely to report involvement in student clubs.	$p < .001$
More likely to report involvement in Pride Alliance.	$p < .05$
More likely to report not being currently employed.	$p < .05$
Less likely to report employment off campus.	$p < .001$
More likely to report being from an urban setting.	$p < .001$
More likely to be an out-of-state student.	$p < .001$
More likely from White neighborhood.	$p < .001$
More likely to have a guardian with college experience.	$p < .05$
More likely to have a guardian with a four-year degree.	$p < .001$
More likely to identify as Middle Upper to Upper class.	$p < .001$
More likely to report a higher family income.	$p < .001$
Less likely to have received grant aid.	$p < .001$
Less likely to have received a loan.	$p < .001$
More likely to identify as Republican.	$p < .001$

Social Justice

The survey instrument presented questions about perceptions and experiences both within the fraternal community and general campus community on a variety of social justice measures related to age, gender, race and ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, and religion. Except where otherwise noted, respondents rated items on a 9 point scale indicating how they perceived the items. Table 5 illustrates the relationship between being affiliated with a fraternal organization and each item, and presents the means on responses for affiliated and non-affiliated respondents. The asterisk following each item indicates the level of significance for those survey items that were found to be statistically significant in a Chi Square Analysis (* for $p < .05$, ** for $p < .001$).

Table 5: Social Justice Measures for Fraternally Affiliated Respondents Showing Difference from Non-Affiliated Respondents, Mean Comparison of Social Justice Measures

Social Justice Measure (Fraternally Affiliated Respondents were…)	Mean, Affiliated	Mean, Non-Affiliated
Less likely to report that their own beliefs regarding people of different racial/ethnic groups have a greater influence on their behavior toward others than their friends' beliefs.*	6.50	7.19
More likely to consider fraternal organizations to be diverse on the basis of religion.**	6.19	4.51
More likely to consider fraternal organizations to be diverse on the basis of gender.**	6.06	4.98
Less likely to express willingness to marry or choose as a life partner a person from a different racial/ethnic group.**	5.96	6.92
More likely to perceive the campus fraternal community as being tolerant of others.**	5.79	4.36
Less likely to report a racially/ethnically diverse circle of friends.**	5.62	6.60
More likely to consider fraternal organizations to be diverse on the basis of race/ethnicity.**	5.32	4.07
More likely to consider fraternal organizations to be diverse on the basis of socio-economic status.**	5.16	3.56
More likely to agree that racial/ethnic similarity among group members working on a task may lead to more positive attitudes.*	5.15	5.07
More likely to consider fraternal organizations to be diverse on the basis of age.**	5.05	3.98
More likely to perceive the campus fraternal community as being racially/ethnically diverse.**	4.70	3.49
Less likely to be socially drawn to older students.**	4.66	5.38
Less likely to be socially drawn to faculty.*	4.59	5.10
Less likely to perceive the campus fraternal community as being prejudiced toward others of a different race/ethnicity.**	3.84	5.14

(* $p < .05$, ** $p < .001$)

Four social justice measures, not represented in the table above, were not on a 9 point scale. In one item, affiliated respondents were **less** likely to report conversations with others of a different sexual orientation ($p < .05$). This item looked at the frequency of conversations about this topic: 18.7% of affiliated respondents reported daily conversations, versus 27.0% of non-affiliated respondents; 24.6% of affiliated respondents reported a conversation at least once a week, versus 22.0% of non-affiliated respondents; 16.6% of affiliated respondents reported a conversation at least twice a month, versus 10.6% of non-affiliated respondents; 13.9% of affiliated respondents reported a conversation at least once a month, versus 7.8% of non-affiliated respondents; 14.4% of affiliated respondents reported a conversation at least once a semester, versus 13.5% of non-affiliated respondents; and 4.8% of affiliated respondents reported never having a conversation, versus 4.6% of non-affiliated respondents. The mean for affiliated respondents was 3.77, and the mean for non-affiliated respondents was 3.69.

The other three social justice measures used dichotomous variables (yes or no answers) and were significant. Affiliated respondents were **less** likely to consider themselves to be an ally to minority groups on campus ($p < .05$): 28.8% of affiliated respondents said yes, versus 37.9% of non-affiliated respondents. Affiliated respondents were **more** likely to consider themselves to be aware of events on campus related to diversity and social justice ($p < .05$): 34.9% of affiliated respondents said yes, versus 25.1% of non-affiliated respondents. Affiliated respondents were **less** likely to consider themselves to be active in talking with friends about issues of diversity and social justice ($p < .001$): 23.1% of affiliated respondents said yes, versus 41.4% of non-affiliated respondents.

In looking at affiliated respondents and privilege, those students who received grants seemed to differ from those who did not. Affiliated respondents who received grants were **more** likely to consider themselves to be an ally to minority groups on campus ($p < .001$): 52.0% of grant recipients said yes, versus 22.3% of other affiliated respondents. Affiliated respondents who received grants were also **more** likely to consider themselves to be aware of events on campus related to diversity and social justice ($p < .05$): 52.0% of grant recipients said yes, versus 30.2% of other affiliated respondents. Finally, affiliated respondents who received grants were **more** likely to consider themselves to be active in talking with friends about issues of diversity and social justice ($p < .05$): 42.0% of grant recipients said yes, versus 17.9% of other affiliated respondents. This suggests that those affiliate respondents with less socio-economic privilege may be more aware of and engaged in social justice issues.

Affiliated and non-affiliated respondents seemed to differ in their perceptions of how diverse fraternal organizations are, with affiliated respondents perceiving these organizations to be tolerant and diverse on the basis of age, gender, race and ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and

religion, as noted in Table 5. While affiliated respondents were more likely than non-affiliated respondents to consider themselves to be aware of events on campus related to diversity and social justice, and tended to be more involved in extracurricular activities through student clubs and athletics, they tended to be less socially drawn to others, such as older, non-traditional age students (see Table 5). This is important because fraternal organizations at the University of Arizona primarily serve traditional age students, and may limit social opportunities to interact with non-traditional age students.

Affiliated respondents were less likely to report meaningful conversations with others who differed by sexual orientation (see Table 5). This is of concern since LGBTQ students are underrepresented in fraternal organizations and discrimination against LGBTQ students by individuals in fraternal organizations is an issue nation-wide (Windmeyer, 1999). Race and ethnicity is also an issue, since ethnic minorities are underrepresented in traditionally white organizations (Gregory, 2003, Sax 2008). Affiliated respondents were less likely to report diverse friendships on the basis of race/ethnicity, a willingness to marry or choose as a life partner outside their race, and that their own beliefs had more influence than the beliefs of friends. They were more likely to agree that racial/ethnic similarity among group members working on a task may lead to more positive attitudes (see Table 5).

Regarding social justice, affiliated respondents were less likely to consider themselves to be an ally to minority groups on campus or to consider themselves to be active in talking with friends about issues of diversity and social justice (see Table 5). There seems to be a disconnect between affiliated respondents' perceptions of their fraternal organization as being diverse and how they perceived their own interactions with those who are different from themselves. Privilege in socio-economic resources may be important here, as those affiliated respondents who received grants tended to be more engaged in social justice issues. In addition, non-affiliated respondents who do not see fraternal organizations as diverse may have their own biases regarding those who are affiliated, increasing the social distance between affiliated and non-affiliated students.

Suggestions for Next Steps

While the above findings are limited to this study and should not be generalized, we offer several recommendations for practice to consider, based on best practices, national data, and findings in this study.

If students are going to be successful in a multicultural society, they must have a critical lens to understand issues of privilege and social justice and how their backgrounds influence their perspectives on these issues. It is not enough to simply bring students together—the context of the institution or fraternal organization must also be considered (Chang, 2005) so that educational interventions on diversity can have a positive effect (Probst, 2003).

- To facilitate the development of critical thinking, fraternal organizations can **provide educational interventions in which students can meaningfully confront and challenge their preconceptions**, thus increasing their awareness of prejudice in their environments, with the hope of encouraging them to take a proactive social justice stance.

There seems to be a disconnect between how affiliated respondents perceived both their fraternal organizations' openness to social justice and diversity as well as their own level of openness when compared to their self-reported levels of social distance from students and populations who are different. Also, affiliated respondents seemed to be aware of programs and events related to social justice and diversity, but they did not report engaging themselves or their affiliated brothers/sisters in such programs, events, and/or discussions.

- These findings emphasize the need for **further consideration about the way social justice and diversity programming and/or messaging is shared and perceived on campuses and further exploration of student engagement and inclusion, testing program outcomes.** This is especially true within men's fraternal organizations, which have traditionally been perceived as unwelcoming spaces for students from underrepresented student populations (Windmeyer, 1999). It is important to further study the perspectives of affiliated men and to find more ways to involve men in conversations about social justice.

Moreover, the significant difference in levels of socio-economic status between affiliated and non-affiliated respondents seen through this study, and in other national studies, intimate that class is a salient lens through which students create their own assumptions regarding social justice and diversity. Further study is needed regarding class differences among affiliated students—this may provide more information about perspectives of affiliated students.

- Findings regarding socio-economic status in this study reveal the need to **increase more structured and formal intergroup dialogue,** focusing on personal identity, oppression, and privilege.

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