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SENSE OF BELONGING IN GREEK LETTERED ORGANIZATIONS,
IS IT DIFFERENT FOR FIRST-GENERATION STUDENTS?

by

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A THESIS

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SENSE OF BELONGING IN GREEK LETTERED ORGANIZATIONS,
IS IT DIFFERENT FOR FIRST-GENERATION STUDENTS?

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University of Nebraska, 2016

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Involvement on a college campus can lead to students' persistence through graduation (Tinto, 1993). Student attrition can be an issue at institutions and Tinto (2012) states, "For four-year colleges and universities, whether public or private, 38% of those who leave will do so in their first year, and 29% in their second year" (p. 3). All students come to college with different backgrounds, experiences, and identities that impact their intentions on departing from their institutions (Tinto, 1975). One of these characteristics is first-generation student status. This quantitative study explored the experiences of first-generation and non-first-generation students by analyzing their sense of belonging to their membership in Greek lettered organizations and at their institution. Participants were from three different Midwestern institutions. To answer the research questions, a t-test was conducted to see if there is a difference between first-generation and non-first-generation students' sense of belonging to their chapter and institution. To find out if a relationship exists between the sense of belonging to students' chapter and to their institution a Pearson's correlation was completed. Lastly, a Fisher's Z-transformation test was conducted to see if the relationship between the students' sense of belonging to their chapter and to their institution is different for first-generation and non-first-generation students. The findings indicate that there is no statistical significant

difference of sense of belonging to chapter and institution for first-generation and non-first-generation students. A relationship does exist between the sense of belonging to chapter and to the institution. The relationship for sense of belonging to chapter and institution is different for first-generation and non-first-generation students in that first-generation students do not have a significant correlation with a relationship between chapter and institution sense of belonging. Recommendations from the findings of this study are presented for higher education administrators who support first-generation students and fraternity and sorority life advisors. Areas of future research are also provided in this study.

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Dedication

To all of the first-generation students who have found their place on campus and have found a home within their fraternity or sorority and are the first in their family to graduate from college.

Table of Contents

| | |
|--|----|
| Chapter 1—Introduction | 1 |
| Statement of Problem | 4 |
| Purpose of Study | 5 |
| Research Questions | 5 |
| Definitions of Key Terms | 6 |
| Overview of Research Methods..... | 7 |
| Significance of Study..... | 8 |
| Summary | 9 |
| Chapter 2—Review of Selected Literature | 10 |
| Tinto’s Theory of student departure | 10 |
| Critiques of Tinto..... | 13 |
| Involvement | 14 |
| Overview of Involvement | 15 |
| Involvement and Persistence..... | 16 |
| Sense of Belonging | 17 |
| Overview of Sense of Belonging | 17 |
| Model of Sense of Belonging | 18 |
| Sense of Belonging and Involvement | 20 |
| Greek lettered organizations | 22 |
| History of Greek lettered organizations | 22 |
| Benefits to Greek lettered organizations | 24 |

| | |
|--|----|
| First-generation Students | 25 |
| Barriers of First-generation students..... | 26 |
| First in the Family..... | 27 |
| Financial Constraints | 28 |
| Internal Psychology of First-generation Students..... | 29 |
| Establishing Relationships | 31 |
| Gap in Literature | 32 |
| Chapter 3— Methodology | 34 |
| Purpose of Study | 34 |
| Research Questions | 35 |
| Question One | 35 |
| Null hypothesis: chapter sense of belonging | 35 |
| Alternative hypothesis: chapter sense of belonging..... | 35 |
| Null hypothesis: institution sense of belonging..... | 35 |
| Alternative hypothesis: institution sense of belonging | 36 |
| Question Two..... | 36 |
| Null hypothesis | 36 |
| Alternative hypothesis | 36 |
| Question Three..... | 36 |
| Null hypothesis | 36 |
| Alternative hypothesis | 37 |
| Theoretical Framework..... | 37 |

| | |
|--|----|
| Population and Participants..... | 38 |
| Instrumentation | 39 |
| Survey Items | 40 |
| Data Collection | 40 |
| Data Analysis | 41 |
| Question One | 42 |
| Question Two..... | 42 |
| Question Three | 43 |
| Summary | 44 |
| Chapter 4—Results | 45 |
| Demographics | 45 |
| Results | 48 |
| Question One | 48 |
| Question Two..... | 49 |
| Question Three..... | 49 |
| Summary | 50 |
| Chapter 5—Discussion | 52 |
| Restatement of Research Questions..... | 52 |
| Question One | 53 |
| Question Two..... | 53 |
| Question Three..... | 53 |
| Methods and Procedures | 53 |

| | |
|--|----|
| Discussion of Results | 54 |
| Demographics | 54 |
| Difference in Chapter and Institution Sense of Belonging | 55 |
| Relationship to Chapter and Institution Sense of Belonging | 57 |
| Relationship Difference | 59 |
| Implications..... | 61 |
| Theoretical | 61 |
| Practical..... | 62 |
| Limitations | 64 |
| Research Design..... | 64 |
| Unforeseen | 65 |
| Areas for Future Research | 66 |
| Conclusion | 67 |
| References | 68 |

List of Tables

| | | |
|-----------|---|----|
| Table 4.1 | Race & Ethnicity of Participants..... | 46 |
| Table 4.2 | Socioeconomic Status of Participants..... | 47 |

List of Appendices

| | | |
|------------|--------------------|----|
| Appendix A | Survey | 77 |
| Appendix B | IRB Approval | 86 |

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Involvement is a key component of student persistence on a college campus (Astin 1984; Tinto, 1975, 1987, 1993). First-generation students are more likely to drop out of college compared to non-first-generation students. (Heisserer & Parette, 2002). Student affairs professionals must understand the needs and challenges faced by first-generation students because they are different from non-first-generation students (Davis, 2010). First-generation students face integration issues among their peers, faculty, and staff, and have a lower rate of retention (Davis, 2010). First generation students are defined as "...students who are the first members of their families to attend college" (Chen & Carroll, 2005, para. 1).

There are various challenges that face first-generation students on college campuses. The first challenge presented is first-generation students being the first in their family to attend higher education. Since these students are the first in their family to attend college, they are not as prepared as non-first-generation students because first-generation students do not have the knowledge provided by their parents to share experiences of what college is like (Bradbury & Mather, 2009). Therefore, first-generation students arrive at an institution and must navigate their path on their own without help from their parents. Another challenge first-generation students experience is remaining at their institutions through graduation; such students are considered at risk. Students who are considered at risk have a more difficult time adjusting to college life (Heisserer & Parette, 2002).

First-generation students have a difficult time adjusting to college and it is critical for them to establish a sense of belonging in order to persist at their institutions (Engle, Bermeo, & O'Brien, 2006). A sense of belonging refers to the "...students' perceived social support on campus, a feeling or sensation of connectedness, the experience of mattering or feeling cared about, accepted, respected, valued by, and important to a group (e.g., campus community) or others on campus (e.g., faculty, peers)" (Strayhorn, 2012, p. 3). Sense of belonging can be established by a connection with a minimum of one person (Heisserer & Parette, 2002). Membership in social communities on a college campus can foster a sense of belonging through the relationships that are built between members (Gloria, Kurpius, Hamilton, & Wilson, 1999). When relationships are formed, support between members is established. This support between peers is extremely important for first-generation students to persist at their institutions (Tinto, 2012). Establishing social relationships are a challenge for first-generation students because they feel like outsiders and find it more difficult to blend in with others (Lohfink & Paulsen, 2005). First-generation students are unfamiliar with the campus culture and what it means to be college students, making it more difficult to interact with their non-first-generation peers (Davis, 2010).

One way that a sense of belonging can be fostered is through involvement on campus. Without involvement and a sense of belonging, students are less likely to persist at their current institution (Tinto, 1987, 1993). Involvement in forms of student activities, mentor programs, advising, and residence life are critical for first-generation students because these forms of involvement establish connections among the campus

(Torres, 2004). Involvement in organizations helps first-generation students navigate the institution by the information received from individuals in the organization. Involvement in organizations also creates a sense of belonging to the institution because of the time spent on campus participating in the organizations' activities (Torres & Solberg, 2001). Involvement in organizations provides a platform for social support at the institution and is essential for first-generation students to form relationships with their peers (Santos & Riegasdas, 2004).

Participation in campus organizations helps to alleviate the loneliness students feel and can help students from departing the institution (Fleming, 1984). Participation in campus organizations or activities is considered social involvement (Tinto, 1987, 1993, 2010). Tinto suggested that students can become socially involved with their institutions through campus activities such as Greek Life, student government, and campus recreation (Tinto, 1993).

Participation in a Greek lettered organization (GLO), otherwise referred to as a fraternity or sorority, is a form of social involvement. This particular form of involvement is the focus of this study. The positive benefits of fraternity/sorority life membership are that this population of students is more likely to participate in other student activities, volunteer opportunities, have stronger relationships with student affairs staff, and higher quality relationships with their peers when compared to students who are non-members (Asel, Seifert, & Pascarella, 2015). Students who are members of a GLO sometimes have higher academic rankings compared to non-members (Debard & Sacks, 2011). Previous research that dates back almost 20 years shows how long membership in

a GLO has been beneficial for college students. According to Winston, Nettles III, and Opper (1987), membership in a GLO has the potential to provide positive living experiences on college campuses and to establish relationships with the campus community. Membership in a GLO increases students' sense of belonging and persistence through graduation (Astin 1975; DeBard, Lake & Binder, 2006; Willingham, 1972). There is a lack of research on first-generation students' membership in GLOs and their sense of belonging to their chapter and institution. Previous research does not focus on the experiences of first-generation students.

This study focused on membership in a Greek lettered organization and the sense of belonging to students' respective chapters and institutions. Students who have a higher rate of involvement also have a higher rate of persistence according to Tinto (1993). First-generation students who are involved in Greek Life are more successful in the classroom and are more likely to stay at their institution (Pike & Kuh, 2005). However, there is a lack of research on sense of belonging for first-generation and non-first-generation students who are members of GLOs. This study analyzed the sense of belonging for members of GLOs and determined if there were differences between first-generation and non-first-generation students.

Statement of Problem

Previous literature states that establishing a sense of belonging even with one individual within the institution can greatly impact students' decisions to remain at their institution (Heisserer & Parette, 2002). Torres (2004) found that first-generation students who have established a sense of belonging are less likely to drop out of their institution.

Students that join an organization and create relationships with members have a stronger rate of persistence to those students who do not become involved on campus (Tinto, 2010). Relationships that are built among peers are critical for students to establish a sense of belonging to their institution (Strayhorn, 2012). There have been research studies and publications that measure a sense of belonging and student involvement, but a study comparing the experience of first-generation students and non-first-generation students by measuring their sense of belonging to their individual Greek lettered organizations and to their institution is missing from the literature. This study aims to analyze this relationship.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to compare the experience of first-generation students and non-first-generation students by measuring their sense of belonging to their individual GLOs and to their institutions. This study surveyed students who are members of GLOs in three different Midwest institutions of higher education. There is little to no research on the sense of belonging of members of GLOs and more specifically on the experiences of first-generation student members. This research is looking to fill the gap in literature in how membership in GLOs influences the sense of belonging to students' individual chapters and their institutions.

Research Questions

These three questions were developed to analyze the relationship between first-generation students and their sense of belonging to their chapters and their institutions.

Question 1: Do first-generation and non-first-generation students who are members of GLOs differ in terms of their sense of belonging to their respective chapters and/or to their institutions?

Question 2: Is the sense of belonging to an individual's chapter related to the sense of belonging to his/her institution?

Question 3: Is the correlation between chapter and institution sense of belonging different for first-generation students compared to non-first-generation students?

Definitions of Key Terms

To better understand the language used in this research study and literature review, I will define several terms that will be used.

Academic integration. “With respect to the academic system of college, it is argued here that an individual's integration can be measured in terms of both his grade performance and his intellectual development during the college years”

(Tinto, 1975, p. 104).

Chapter. “The campus group of a national organization” (Ayres, 2007, p. 9).

First-generation student. “. . . students who are the first members of their families to attend college” (Chen & Carroll, 2005, para. 1).

Greek lettered organizations. A term applied social organizations that use Greek Letters for representation (Ayers, 2007).

Persistence. Refers “. . . to the rate at which students who begin higher education at a given point in time continue in higher education and eventually complete their degree, regardless of where they do so” (Tinto, 2012, p. 127).

Sense of belonging. "...students' perceived social support on campus, a feeling or sensation of connectedness, the experience of mattering or feeling cared about, accepted, respected, valued by, and important to a group (e.g., campus community" or others on campus (e.g., faculty, peers)" (Strayhorn, 2012, p. 3).

Social integration. "Seen as the interactions between the individual with given sets of characteristics (backgrounds, values, and commitments, etc.) and other persons of varying characteristics within the college ..." (Tinto, 1975, p. 107)

Student attrition. Describes "... the rate at which students terminate college without completing a degree" (Tinto, 2012, p. 128).

Overview of Research Methods

The lack of research studies measuring the sense of belonging of first-generation students who are members of GLOs informed the questions of research for this study. The methods were developed by evaluating prior literature and what is missing. In order to conduct this study a survey was created to answer the research questions. This survey collected quantitative data from students who are members of GLOs at three institutions located in the Midwest region of the United States. The statements used in this survey were adapted from survey by France and Finney (2010) that focused on university sense of belonging. The survey created by France and Finney (2010) used the terms "college campus" and the items were changed to "my chapter" and "my institution" in this study to establish relevance with the research questions. Participants were asked to respond by indicating the degree to which they agreed with each statement using a 5-point Likert

response scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Eight demographic questions were included in the survey.

An independent t-test was conducted to see too determine the difference between first-generation and non-first-generation students' sense of belonging to their chapter and institution. To determine if a relationship exists between the sense of belonging to students' chapter and to their institution a Pearson's correlation was completed. Lastly, a Fisher's Z-transformation test was conducted to determine if the relationship between the students' sense of belonging to their chapter and to their institution is different for first-generation students.

Significance of Study

First-generation students face different challenges compared to non-first generation students. There is a lack of research on first-generation students' sense of belonging in GLOs and in their institutions. This study presents some implications for student affairs professionals on how to effectively help first-generation students benefit from their membership in their GLOs. This study is important because when students have an increased sense of belonging, they also increase the chance of committing to their institutions (Tinto, 2012). The relationship between sense of belonging to chapter and institution is important to study because the findings could either support to contradict current research. Membership in a GLO may prove to be highly beneficial for first-generation students to become socially integrated and establish a commitment to their institutions.

Summary

There is a need for research to explain how first-generation students can establish a sense of belonging in their GLOs and institutions. Sense of belonging and involvement at an institution increase persistence. If students do not create a sense of belonging to their institutions, they are more likely to drop out. Analyzing the relationship between membership in a GLO and sense of belonging may lead to results that can help provide ways for first-generation students to become more connected with their institution and complete their degrees. The survey that was conducted measured both sense of belonging to an individual's chapter and to their institution. The data analysis explains any differences for first-generation students compared to non-first-generation students.

Chapter 2 is a discussion of literature that is related to the purpose of this study and presents barriers to first-generation students, positive benefits to membership in a GLO, and how a sense of belonging is critical to student success. Chapter 3 provides a thorough explanation of the research methods used in this study. The methodology will include selection of instrumentation, recruitment procedures, and data collection and analysis techniques used in this study. Chapter 4 includes the results and findings from the data broken down by research question. Lastly, Chapter 5 discusses the implications of the findings and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF SELECTED LITERATURE

In this chapter, past literature pertaining to the research questions of this study is discussed. The focus of this chapter is to provide a brief understanding of the foundational literature regarding first-generation students and their sense of belonging to institutions and Greek lettered organizations (GLOs). The literature review involves four areas: (a) a brief description of Tinto's (1975, 1987, 1993) theory of student departure, (b) a review of the importance of involvement on campus and how it leads to student persistence, (c) a review of sense of belonging, (d) the history and importance of Greek lettered organizations in relation to membership benefits, and (e) review of literature on the common issues first-generation students face at an institution of higher education. The conclusion states how involvement in GLOs increases persistence and is a valuable asset to first-generation students.

Tinto's Theory of Student Departure

Tinto's (1975, 1987, 1993) theory of student departure helps explain the issue of student attrition in college and serves as the framework for this research study. Tinto provides a theory that seeks to explain attrition and the longitudinal process of interactions that leads students to persistence or dropout at their institution.

Tinto (1975) created a model for student departure. This model explained the process of interactions that inform students' decision to stay or leave their institution. Built into the model are individual characteristics such as the students' backgrounds and various identities that they bring with them to the institution. These diverse attributes

then shape the next step that is a component in which students decide their level of commitment to the institution and their own goals (Tinto, 1975). Individual characteristics and commitments are the inputs for the model. Following goal and institutional commitment are the interactions that influence students' decisions to drop out or stay. These interactions are the experiences students have with others inside and outside of the classroom (Tinto, 1975). The students' backgrounds and characteristics also have weight with how they interact with others at their institutions. When students interact with each other, they become a part of the academic and social communities at their institutions. As students become members of their institutions' communities, students make decisions on staying or leaving their institutions. The more integrated students become with their institutions, the more likely they are to remain at their current institutions (Tinto, 1975).

Tinto identifies two forms of integration in the theory. Academic integration refers to “. . . an individual's integration . . . [of] . . . both his grade performance and his intellectual development during the college years” (Tinto, 1975, p. 104). Social integration is seen as “. . . the interactions between the individual with given sets of characteristics (backgrounds, values, and commitments, etc.) and other persons of varying characteristics within the college . . . ” (Tinto, 1975, p. 107). Tinto (1975) summarized that academic integration affects goal commitment and social integration, with other college students and in student activities and in organizations, directly relates to a person's institutional commitment. This process is critical to the persistence of students because their integration weighs on the students' decisions to leave the

institution; in other words, the more interactions students have with peers the less likely they are to leave.

There are three stages that student pass through to become incorporated into the academic and social systems of institutions that eventually lead to persistence (Tinto, 1987, 1993). This three-staged process is what students go through when they begin their journey at their institutions. According to Tinto's (1987, 1993) theory, it is vital that students pass through all three stages to become fully integrated with their campus and peers. The three stages are separation, transition, and incorporation (Tinto, 1987, 1993). Students enter institutions bringing their own characteristics such as gender, race, parental education levels, and different levels of commitment to the institution (Tinto, 1987, 1993). Separation involves students' ability to disconnect themselves from the culture of their past. Next, the students must enter the transition stage where they separate themselves from their past and let go of their old norms, but have yet to adapt to their new culture. Lastly, incorporation happens when students start adopting the norms of their institutions' culture (Tinto, 1987, 1993). The primary component of incorporation is academic and social integration of students into their institutions by adopting new norms into their lives. Once the students become incorporated, they also become integrated into the institutional environments, and, according to Tinto (1867, 1993), are likely to-consider staying (Tinto, 1987, 1993).

Tinto (1993) claimed in his research that student involvement is critical for students to stay and graduate from college. He also emphasized the relationship between student involvement and the impact involvement has on student persistence. In Tinto's

words, “Involvement with one’s peers and with the faculty, both inside and outside of the classroom, is itself positively related to the quality of student effort and in turn to both learning and persistence” (Tinto, 1993, p. 71). Not only is involvement a key piece in Tinto’s theory that leads to persistence, social integration is a way students can build a connection to the institution. Students who have positive social interactions with their peers will have a better opportunity to become socially integrated and remain in college. Tinto (1993) suggested various ways students could become socially integrated into their institutions through campus activities such as residence hall activities, student union activities, intramural sports, and Greek Life.

Critiques of Tinto’s Theory of Student Departure

In Tinto’s (1975, 1987, 1993) theory of student departure, there is no mention of minorities groups such as first-generation or racially diverse students. The National Center for Education Statistics (2012) indicated that students of color have a lower degree completion rate in comparison to White students. Tinto (1975, 1987, 1993) built the Theory of student departure on student integration and commitment to the institution thus creating persistence in students. Museus (2014) states four major critiques of Tinto’s (1975, 1987, 1993) theory. The four critiques are cultural foundation, self-determination, integration viability, and psychological dimension. These critiques are mentioned because it is important to understand that not every student can fit into Tinto’s (1975, 1987, 1993) theory of student departure. Museus (2014) finds through a review of literature an alternative viewpoint is to take into account of students’ cultural

backgrounds and how other students on campus can interact with other cultures to equally shape everyone's experiences (Museus & Quaye as cited in Muses 2014).

Dowd, Sawatzky, & Korn (2011) suggest a theoretical concept that includes race/ethnicity diversity in persistence models for college students. The research for the concept by Dowd et al. (2011) was guided by a study done by Museus and Maramba (2011) that suggests minority students experience less of a sense of belonging when compared to majority students because minority students do not spend as much time getting involved with their education. Dowd et al. (2011) developed their own conceptual framework by analyzing traditional theories, such as Tinto and cultural constraints. Dowd et al. (2011) mentioned that a limitation of traditional theories is that they do not have a focus on the racial and cultural experiences of students of color in college. Because these traditional theories do not take into account for the diversity of students, Tinto's theory provides false recommendations for minority group students (Dowd et al., 2011). Dowd et al. (2011) suggested that future research focuses on the students' perceptions, experiences, and behaviors of cultural constraints on college campuses because it would help to lead to the development of a theoretical framework that focuses on the development of both the student and staff intercultural efforts made to predict persistence.

Involvement

Involvement, a second area of the literature review, is critical to understanding how to bridge the gap between how social integration can influence involvement and thus establish persistence for college students. Tinto's (1993) theory suggests that

involvement is a vital piece for student persistence. A definition of involvement and how it relates to persistence is reviewed in this section.

Overview of Involvement

To understand the term of involvement, the definition by Astin (1984) is used to expand upon how involvement leads to persistence, as indicated by Tinto's (1993) research. A definition of involvement by Astin (1984) states

...student involvement refers to the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience. Thus, a highly involved student is one who, for example, devotes considerable energy to studying, spends much time on campus, participates actively in student organizations, and interacts frequently with faculty members and other students.” (p. 518)

Astin (1984) states that involvement is something students do as an action. There are five basic postulates in the involvement theory by Astin (1984) are described below.

“... involvement refers to the investment of physical and psychological energy in various objects. . .” (p. 519)

“... involvement occurs along a continuum; that is, different students manifest different degrees of involvement in a given object, and the same student manifests different degrees of involvement in different objects at different times.” (p. 519)

“... involvement has both quantitative and qualitative features. . .”(p. 519)

“...amount of student learning and personal development associated with any educational program is directly proportional to the quality and quantity of student involvement in that program.” (p. 519)

“...the effectiveness of any educational policy or practice is directly related to the capacity of that policy or practice to increase student involvement.” (p. 519)

These postulates help students to understand the amount time they need to set aside to become involved on their campuses and how policies made by their institutions can influence the types of involvement available (Astin, 1984).

Involvement and Persistence

Tinto's (1993) theory suggests that involvement is critical for student persistence. The more students are socially involved with other people on campus, the more likely they will stay and graduate from college (Astin, 1984; Tinto, 1975, 1987, 1993). Referring back to Tinto's (1993) theory, the last stage is incorporation; involvement can be a facilitator of incorporation. Students that become incorporated into their college environments have adapted new norms and removed themselves from the norms of their pasts (Tinto, 1993). These students have been able to adopt new norms and behaviors that are a representative of their institution. Involvement leads to membership-in campus organizations (Tinto, 1993).

Social membership through involvement creates meaning that students attach to their organization and campus and influences their decisions to stay or leave their institution (Tinto, 2012). Students who persist at their institutions need a connection to at

least one organization or community on campus (Tinto, 2012). Students are more likely to become involved in groups that relates to their interests. Students who interact with student groups with similar interests-become socially integrated. Social integration has a higher influence on persistence than academic integration (Berger & Milem, 1997). Involved students are supported by their peers and their institutions. The support fostered by involvement appears to have an effect on students' institutional commitment (Berger & Milem, 1997).

Sense of Belonging

Another focus of this study is on sense of belonging. Tinto's (1993) theory introduced the framework for how involvement can lead to persistence, but it was missing the component of sense of belonging. This section of the literature review will cover research relating to sense of belonging in college students.

Overview of Sense of Belonging

Sense of belonging is one term with many meanings. Strayhorn (2012) references Maslow, "If we know anything at all, we know that belongingness is a basic human motivation and all people have a strong need to belong" (Maslow as cited in Strayhorn, 2012, p. 1). Strayhorn (2012) also uses another statement, "Sense of belonging generally refers to a feeling of connectedness, that one is important or matters to others"(Rosenberg & McCullough, as cited in Strayhorn, 2012, p. 1). Strayhorn's definition is, "...students' perceived social support on campus, a feeling or sensation of connectedness, the experience of mattering or feeling cared about, accepted, respected, valued by, and important to a group (e.g., campus community) or others on campus (e.g.,

faculty, peers)” (Strayhorn, 2012, p. 3). Although there are multiple definitions of sense of belonging. Strayhorn (2012) provides a working explanation that takes into consideration all elements from other definitions and focuses on belonging being a basic human need that drives human behavior.

Model for Sense of Belonging

Strayhorn (2012) developed a model for sense of belonging that consists of seven core elements. The first element is that “sense of belonging is a human need” (Strayhorn, 2012, p. 18). Belonging is a basic need of college students and must be satisfied before any other needs can be met. Strayhorn (2012) suggests that the desired outcome of graduation from college could not be achieved until a student felt a sense of connectedness and belonging in college.

The second element in Strayhorn’s (2012) model is that “sense of belonging is a fundamental motive, sufficient to drive human behavior” (p. 19). The need to belong compels individuals to act. It is why students join organizations or athletics.

The third element is that “sense of belonging takes on heightened importance in certain contexts. . .”, (Strayhorn, 2012, p. 20). Examples of these contexts could be a new individual in an already developed group or marginalized groups. Belonging is context-dependent and it has the greatest influence on persistence for students in these specific groups and populations.

The fourth element is “sense of belonging is related to, and seemingly a consequence of mattering” (Strayhorn, 2012, p. 21). Mattering is defined by “. . . the feeling, rightly or wrongly, that one matters, or is valued or appreciated by others”

(Schlossberg, as cited in Strayhorn, 2012, p. 21). To satisfy the need of belonging, the person must believe someone else cares (Strayhorn, 2012).

The fifth element is “social identities intersect and affect college students’ sense of belonging” (Strayhorn, 2012, p. 22). Everyone feels the need to belong, but this feeling is not equal for all people because of individuals’ various identities. Social identities intersect and are dependent on the context of where the student is and they can affect students’ sense of belonging (Strayhorn, 2012).

The sixth element is “sense of belonging engenders other positive outcomes” (Strayhorn, 2012, p.22). As students’ sense of belonging is satisfied the pathway to involvement, achievement, and happiness is achieved. Students with a satisfied sense of belonging are more influenced to persist at their institution (Strayhorn, 2012).

The last element is “sense of belonging must be satisfied on a continual basis and likely change as circumstances, conditions, and contexts change” (Strayhorn, 2012, p. 23). When a sense of belonging is disrupted, the students have less interest and will possibly leave the institution (Strayhorn, 2012).

All of these elements work together in Strayhorn’s (2012) model for sense of belonging. The model is represented in a hierarchy that is adapted from Maslow. The bottom of the hierarchy for need are: physiological, safety, belonging, and esteem. At the top of the hierarchy is self-actualization that is met once all of the previously listed needs are met. The needs must be fulfilled from the bottom up, and they provide motivation for the individual to reach self-actualization (Maslow, as cited in Strayhorn, 2012).

Once the physiological and safety needs are met, students desire a need for their social needs to be met. Students may satisfy these needs by becoming involved in campus clubs and establishing relationships through these groups. When students have met their social belonging needs they have greater capabilities for growth and persistence at their institutions (Strayhorn, 2012). While students are searching for groups to belong in, they find themselves among many different social spaces and contexts. Students must navigate through these spaces in order to find a place they belong. Sometimes students may find that they belong in multiple social circles that fill their belongingness needs (Strayhorn, 2012).

Sense of Belonging and Involvement

Strayhorn's (2012) model for sense of belonging is used to provide possible outcomes for students who obtain the need for a sense of belonging. To achieve a sense of belonging on a college campus, students must become academically and socially involved at their institutions. When students become involved in academic and social group on campus, they create meaningful relationships with peers, staff, and faculty (Strayhorn, 2012). Feelings that are developed through this process of involvement will enhance students' commitments, connections, and retention (Strayhorn, 2012). A study by Hurtado and Carter (1997) found that students who are members of organizations, fraternities/sororities, student government or athletics have a very positive relationship to a sense of belonging on their campuses. Students who were members of religious organizations and fraternities/sororities were found to have a stronger sense of belonging

as they returned to campus for their second year at their institution in comparison to students who were involved in other groups (Hurtado & Carter, 1997).

A students' sense of belonging can be fulfilled by the experiences they have during their involvement on campus. Students who are involved with student organizations feel that they are more connected to their institution compared to students who are not involved. Strayhorn (2012) found in an analysis of the College Students Experience Questionnaire that the data showed that involvement can influence a student's sense of belonging. There are two major findings about the connection between involvement and sense of belonging. Strayhorn (2012) first found that students believe that involvement enables a sense of belonging and this is why they decide to join groups on campus. Strayhorn (2012) found secondly

. . .stories from the participants revealed four ways that involvement engenders students' sense of belonging in college: (1) connecting students with others who share their interests, values, and commitments; (2) familiarizing students with the campus environment and ecology; (3) affirming students' identity, interests, and values as "a part of campus" (in the words of a participant); and (4) generating feelings among students that they matter and others depend on them. (p. 115)

Students can acquire a sense of belonging by spending time getting involved in an organization or a group on campus by taking an active role. Involvement aids students to build relationships with others, become acquainted to layout of campus, figure out who they are and where they fit in (Strayhorn, 2012).

Greek Lettered Organizations

Forms of involvement were presented earlier in this chapter and one of them is membership in a Greek lettered organizations (GLOs), or sometimes known as a fraternity or sorority. Students need to feel the need to belong to have a positive experience at their institutions (Strayhorn, 2012).

History of Greek Lettered Organizations

The history of GLOs is important to understand because they are part of the institutional culture and GLOs have changed over time to fit the needs of college students. The groups that were first established appealed to students who were wealthy and had the desire to become a member of a GLO (Mattingly & Horowitz, 1988). The history of GLOs has been around since 1776 and has evolved with the changing landscapes of higher education institutions. Phi Beta Kappa was founded in 1776 at the College of William and Mary during the American Revolution. Phi Beta Kappa was started as a literary society and on the principles of freedom that allowed discussions and expression of opinions. The Greek letters stand for “love of learning is the guide of life” which is also the motto of this Society (Phi Beta Kappa Society, n.d.). Other chapters were established in the New England area at Harvard and Yale. After the American Revolutionary War, 25 more chapters were added by 1883. The first women to be inducted into this society were from the University of Vermont in 1875 and the first African-Americans were inducted at Yale in 1874. Today there are 283 chapters across the country (Phi Beta Kappa Society, n.d.) This increase of chapters across the country

shows the influence GLOs have on college campuses. Other societies were founded for different reasons.

The first recognized general literary society, Kappa Alpha, was formed in 1825 at Union College. The Kappa Alpha Society was founded on the basis that any academic discipline could be discussed with the opportunity for the group to gather and present ideas to shake up the college environment (Kappa Alpha Society, n.d.). The difference with the Kappa Alpha Society is that they promoted more of a fraternal environment, fellowship, and enjoyment outside of the formalism of the classroom (Kappa Alpha Society, n.d.). The birth of the Kappa Alpha Society led to a boom in other societies and eventually fraternities and sororities. The first official organization for women, Pi Beta Phi, was founded in 1867 at Monmouth College in Illinois. The term “sorority” did not exist until the 19th century. The first national organization to use the term sorority was Gamma Phi Beta established in 1874 at Syracuse University (Baird as cited in Ayers, 2007).

Many of the earliest fraternities were developed in response to the control that existed from the faculty and growth among these organizations flourished. Although many were started at literary societies, fraternities were developed to become more social so that these groups could become a place for students to develop relationships with each other. The reason why the groups were founded in secrecy is because faculty had strong control over what knowledge students received. Students on campus wanted to discuss topics that were different from what was being taught in classes (Rudolph, as cited in Ayers, 2007). Fraternities became an important social factor in the lives of men in higher

education. Chapters were created as new institutions were established (Dalglish, 1936). According to Baird (cited in Ayers, 2007), a major increase in fraternity chapters emerged during the post-Civil War period. Baird (as cited in Ayers, 2007) “...documented more than seventy national Greek-letter organizations for men and women by the beginning of the First World War. Found on more than five-hundred campuses, their combined membership exceeded 350,000...”,(p. 17).

Benefits to Greek lettered organizations

Membership in a GLO has a variation of benefits for members. Membership helps to establish long lasting relationships and can also provide an outlet for leadership skills to be developed. At one time, Astin (1977) stated, “Fraternity and sorority membership has a substantial positive effect on persistence, overall satisfaction with college, and a satisfaction with instruction and social life” (p. 222). Membership in a GLO also helps students understand what it takes to work for a team. It can also help to establish values and to gain confidence in their own individuality (Winston & Saunders, 1987). All types of GLOs share similar support for the benefits of membership that may lead to institutional retention. Pike and Askew (1990) cite evidence that membership in a GLO produces higher levels of satisfaction with college and retention rates compared to non-Greek members.

Students who spend more time devoted to creating a relationship with their campus environment develop a strong attachment to their institution (Winston & Saunders, 1987). Students affiliated with GLOs are less likely to drop out from their institutions and that their membership establishes a sense of belonging to the institution.

This attachment to the institution by affiliation with a GLO leads to increased persistence of students (Astin, 1975; DeBard et. al, 2006; Willingham, 1972). Graham et al. (2006) found that members of fraternities and sororities had higher rates of retention compared to students who are not members. In the group studied, Graham et al. (2006) found that, “sorority members persistence in the senior year was 93% for the 1991 cohort, compared to 67% for the non-affiliated female cohort. The sorority and non-affiliated female senior retention rate figures for 1993 were 95% and 71% respectively” (p. 66). For fraternity members, Graham et al. (2006) also found that, “...88% of fraternity members in the 1991 cohort persisted at the institution, in contrast to 72% of non-affiliated men. The same comparison for the 1993 cohort was 93% for fraternity men and 73% retention for the non-affiliated men” (p.66).

In summary, students who are members of GLOs are more involved in other campus activities and have more interactions with their peers when compared to nonmembers (Pike & Askew, 1990). Therefore, students involved in GLOs have a higher rate of persistence and these students are much more likely to remain in college through graduation (Winston & Saunders, 1987). When students are involved and satisfied with their experiences at college, they tend to have a higher rate of persistence.

First-generation Students

Students come into institutions of higher education with various characteristics that impact their integration and commitment to the institution (Tinto, 1975). Even though Tinto’s (1975, 1987, 1993) Theory of student departure did not mention first-generation students, this is one background from which students come that shapes their

experiences at their institutions. Several issues of first-generation students are presented in this section.

Barriers of First-generation Students

Davis (2010) provided suggestions to educational professionals who work with first-generation students to help first-generation students overcome the barriers they face when they enter college. Davis (2010) reviewed many of the issues that first-generation students face on a college campus—barriers confronted about which non-first generation students do not worry. Furthermore, Davis (2010) suggests that first-generation students have a more difficult time adjusting to the higher education environment and developing relationships on campus.

Davis (2010) emphasizes that first-generation students can be unfamiliar with the culture of college and what it means to be a college student because they are the first in their family to attend college. Because of the lack of parental and sibling experience about college, first-generation students do not have the same insider knowledge, special language, general understanding that is on a college campus. First-generation students struggle with navigating a college campus without help from their family. First-generation students are not as equipped when they first arrive on a college campus compared to non-first generation.

Davis (2010) also suggests that first-generation students find themselves having to figure out organizational structure and where and how they belong. First-generation students may be less comfortable trying to find groups and space on campus to fit in with. Thus, these students may be less likely to persist when a sense of belonging is not

established (Strayhorn, 2012). First-generation college students are more likely to dropout, more likely to take longer to graduate, and more likely to get a lot less out of their experience in comparison to non-first-generation students. First-generation students may be at risk for leaving the institution, taking longer to receive a degree, and investing less time in college experience compared to non-first generation students (Chen & Carroll, 2005). Because first-generation students experience difficulty fitting in, they are likely to lack confidence and have feelings of isolation (Engle, Bermeo, & O'Brien, 2006). These feelings of isolation emerge on arrival at campus, and first-generation students may limit their sources of information on campus. Though first-generation students may know where to get help, they do not seek or receive support from these staff that can help them learn the campus culture (Davis, 2010).

First in the Family

First-generation students can come to higher education institutions underprepared and feeling lost. Parental experiences may be lacking that can serve as guideposts to students as they navigate the college system (Bradbury & Mather, 2009). These authors emphasized that first-generation students do not hear the stories from their family about how to handle difficult faculty and classes or roommate disputes in the residence halls. Davis (2010) stressed that, although first-generation students may have the same education goals as others, they cannot count on the prior knowledge about how to be successful that non-first generation students may use.

Davis (2010) suggested that during initial transition to college, the first six weeks of the first semester are extremely important for first-generation students. Woosley and

Shepler (2011) sought to determine if Tinto's (1993) theory described first-generation student integration and if Tinto's variables were predictive of student integration. They found that first-generation students' experiences in those first weeks are related with persistence, academic performance, and likelihood of graduation. They used correlations for four predictor variables based on Tinto's model: (a) social integration, (b) academic integration, (c) institutional satisfaction, and (d) homesick-related distress. Woosley and Shepler (2011) found that first-generation students are influenced by the campus environment and recommended that care should be given to ensure that students were in a place that feels like home for students.

Financial Constraints

Another barrier for first-generation students is financial constraints that can interfere with student persistence. Stebleton and Soria (2012) examined the issues first-generation students face at research universities, and found that a frequent obstacle experienced are job responsibilities that can interfere with success in the classroom. Many first-generation students need to maintain a job and/or live at home to save money. This leaves little time to get involved on campus. Not getting involved on campus can hamper persistence through an absence of connecting with peers and the campus environment (Tinto, 1993). However, Thering (2011) reported that some students who come from a lower socioeconomic status are focused on improving their status by obtaining a college degree. The aspiration to improve their quality of life and socioeconomic status drives their inspiration to persist at their institutions (Thering, 2011).

Internal Psychology of First-generation Students

Most students experience some anxiety when they first arrive on campus. For first-generation students, these feelings can last a few days or up to a few months as students adjust to their new environment (Davis, 2010). In order for students to adjust to their new campus culture they must separate themselves from their past and adopt the new norms (Tinto, 1987, 1993). This can be difficult for first-generation students because of their various backgrounds. Hsiao (1992) found that first-generation students must straddle two different cultures as they adjust to their new environment on campus. As first-generation students gradually adopt the culture of the campus, they become separated from their culture at home where they grew up. This separation might cause a first-generation student to take sides and can produce more anxiety and discomfort (Hsiao, 1992).

Davis (2010) posited that first-generation students can feel that they need to provide explanations why they decided to attend college, especially since they are the first in their family and possibly within their group of friends. The author encourages first-generation students to understand who they are and why they made the decision to pursue higher education. First generation students may provide lengthy and well thought out explanations for their behaviors because they have been expected to attend colleges. Davis (2010) suggests that, as first-generation students think about why they wanted to attend college, they begin to concentrate on own identities and who they are and who they will become.

Davis (2010) addresses living space. As first-generation students discover their identities of becoming a college student, they must also adjust to a new physical space to live. They have no prior knowledge or stories of what a campus is supposed to be like. First-generation students can have a hard time making a connection between home and the new college environment. For first-generation students who attend an institution close to home, they might commute, making it even more challenging to make their campus feel comfortable enough (Davis, 2010).

Another barrier cited by Davis (2010) is the feeling of not fitting in. These students worry about this phenomenon before they arrive on campus. The stress of not fitting in for first-generation students can consume their thoughts before and at arrival to college (Clauss-Ehlers & Wibrowski, 2007).

To further explain the difficulty between adjusting to college life for first-generation students, Somers, Woodhouse, and Cofer (2004) examined the impact of background, aspirations, achievement, and college experiences of first-generation students. Somers et al. (2004) found that first-generation students are living between two cultures that can make them less likely to persist. However, the researchers found that the more involved a first-generation student, the higher the rate of success they will experience (Somers et al., 2004). Involvement helps students become more comfortable on campus and find out where they belong (Strayhorn, 2012). Students need to find a place to go to study and hang out with friends (Richardson & Skinner, 1992). In summary, researchers in this area recommend that efforts must be in place to ensure that

first-generation students be comfortable in their physical and social spaces at their higher education institutions.

Establishing Relationships

Support from first-generation students' families may be the first form of support they receive; yet Davis (2010) points out that the support is not always there from the families. Some families of first-generation students value higher education and others do not. Once first-generation students decide to attend higher education, their expectations from their families could change (Somers, et al, 2004). A non-supportive family for first-generation students increases the amount of hardship they experience as they leave home and attend college. This disconnect between families and students creates a stronger need for first-generation students to become involved on their campuses to find support from their peers (Somers et. al, 2004). Tinto's (1987, 1993) model indicates that for student retention to occur, a student must become integrated academically and socially to achieve success. Davis (2010) points out that family dynamics can interfere with the integration process of first-generation students because of their close relationships with family; the type of relationship the student has with family will impact their involvement and the types of relationships they establish with faculty, staff, and peers at their institution.

Jenkins et al. (2013) examined social support for first-generation students and non-first generation students. The researchers found that first-generation students reported less social support from friends and family while attending college. Another area of concern is personal relationships with other students; the topic has not been subject to much research. Lohfink and Paulsen (2005) found that first-generation

students do not consider non-first-generation students to be their peers, even though they are all college students. A probable cause may be the sense that first-generation students do not feel that campus activities and organizations are geared towards their needs and are therefore not involved and in contact with non-first-generation students. First-generation students are likely to drop out of the institution if they do not find groups that match their interests (Lohfink & Paulsen, 2005).

Gap in Literature

Only a few studies on the relationship of membership in fraternity and sorority life and the experiences of first-generation college students have occurred. For example, Ahren, Bureau, Grace-Ran, and Torres (2014) sought to shed light on first-generation students with membership in a fraternity or sorority. The main focus was on the levels of engagement in student activities that are members of Greek Life. The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) was used for the measure of levels of engagement for students in GLOs. The researchers were interested if lack of engagement was a barrier for first-generation students in the transition onto a college campus. The NSSE was administered to almost 1000 campuses. Using this data, the researchers sought to answer the question “. . .are there different reported levels of participation in academically oriented activities for first-generation senior-year students who are members of fraternities and sororities?. . .” (Ahren et al., 2014, p. 1). The results of this study reported that first-generation students who are members of a fraternity or sorority scored higher in several areas compared to non-first-generation students in this study. First-generation students involved in Greek Life had higher gains in general education, higher

integrative learning, and higher reflective thinking compared to non-first-generation students. The research by Ahren et al. (2014) did not consider what aspects of the fraternity and sorority membership might be beneficial for the success of first-generation college to persist through graduation. Referring back to Tinto's (1987, 1993) theory, involvement on campus leads to higher rates of persistence, but does not mention how this impacts first-generation students. The results by Ahren et al. (2014) provides some insight that membership in a GLO produced higher rates of learning and reflective thinking which supports factors of academic integration (Tinto, 1975).

Another study by DeBard and Sacks (2011) focused on the positive benefits of fraternity/sorority life membership such that this population of students are more likely to have higher academic ranks than nonmembers. DeBard and Sacks (2011) found that “. . . student who joined Greek letter organizations in their first year earned significantly higher grade point averages than independent students did” (p. 114). The field can use more and current research analyzing the relationship between membership in a GLO for first-generation students and how membership can contribute to a sense of belonging.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Chapter three provides an overview of the methodology used to conduct this research study. This chapter includes the purpose statement, research questions, theoretical framework of Tinto's (1975, 1987, 1993) theory of student departure, sampling strategy, description of the instrument used for this study, a description of how data were collected, and a description of how the data were analyzed.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to compare the experiences of first-generation students and non-first-generation students by measuring their sense of belonging to their individual Greek lettered organizations (GLOs) and to their institutions. I surveyed students who were members of GLOs in three Midwest institutions of higher education. There is little to no research on the sense of belonging of members of GLOs and, more specifically, on the experiences of first-generation student members. The research questions address possible differences in the relationship between a sense of belonging to chapters and institutions for first-generation and non-first-generation students. Strayhorn (2012) emphasizes that a sense of belonging is fostered through involvement, and Tinto (1993) stresses that involvement also leads to social integration and persistence. I sought to find out if there is a sense of belonging for members of GLOs, if there is a relationship to institution sense of belonging, and if there were differences between first-generation and non-first-generation members for these areas. This research can help fill a gap in

literature for a sense of belonging for members of GLOs and if there is a difference between first-generation students and non-first-generation GLO members.

Research Questions

Three research questions were developed to analyze the experiences of first-generation students and non-first-generation students by measuring their sense of belonging to their individual GLOs and to their institution.

Question One

Question one asked, “Do (a) first-generation and (b) non-first-generation students who are members of GLOs differ in terms of their sense of belonging to their respective chapters and/or to their institutions?”

Null hypothesis: chapter sense of belonging. The null hypothesis is that there is no difference in mean chapter sense of belonging between (a) first-generation and (b) non-first-generation students.

$$H_0: \mu_a = \mu_b$$

Alternative hypothesis: chapter sense of belonging. The alternative hypothesis is that there is a difference in mean chapter sense of belonging between (a) first-generation and (b) non-first-generation students.

$$H_1: \mu_a \neq \mu_b$$

Null hypothesis: institution sense of belonging. The null hypothesis is that there is no difference in mean institution sense of belonging between (a) first-generation and (b) non-first-generation students.

$$H_0: \mu_a = \mu_b$$

Alternative hypothesis: institution sense of belonging. The alternative hypothesis is that there is a difference in institution sense of belonging between (a) first-generation and (b) non-first-generation students.

$$H_1: \mu_a \neq \mu_b$$

Question Two

Question two asked, “What is the relationship between the sense of belonging of members to their individual chapters and their sense of belonging to their institutions?”

The following null and alternative hypotheses are given for this question.

Null hypothesis. The null hypothesis is that no statistical correlation exists between chapter sense of belonging and institutional sense of belonging.

$$H_0: \rho = 0$$

Alternative hypothesis. The alternative hypothesis is that statistical correlation exists between chapter sense of belonging and institutional sense of belonging.

$$H_1: \rho \neq 0$$

Question Three

Question three asked, “Is the correlation between chapter and institution sense of belonging different for first-generation students compared to non-first-generation students?” The following null and alternative hypotheses are given for this question.

Null hypothesis. The null hypothesis is that there is no statistical difference in the correlation between chapter sense of belonging and institution sense of belonging for (a) first-generation and (b) non-first-generation students.

$$H_0: \rho_a = \rho_b$$

Alternative hypothesis. The alternative hypothesis is that there is a statistical difference in the correlation between chapter sense of belonging and institution sense of belonging for (a) first-generation and (b) non-first-generation students.

$$H_1: \rho_a \neq \rho_b$$

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework used for this study was Tinto's (1975, 1987, 1993) theory of student departure. This theory seeks to explain the decision-making process students undergo to either persist or dropout at their institutions. First, the theory has inputs that are individual characteristics and backgrounds that students bring with them to the institution. Students bring initial commitment to the institution and to their own goals (Tinto, 1975). Next, students have interactions with others on campus. These interactions inform the decision that the students make to stay or drop out of the institution. The experiences that the students have inside and outside of the classroom with their peers and faculty integrate them to become a part of the campus (Tinto, 1975). The greater the students' interactions with peers, faculty, and staff, the more likely they are to commit to their goals and to the institution (Tinto, 1975).

In order for students to become integrated into the institution and its culture, they must pass through three stages (Tinto, 1987). The three stages are separation, transition, and incorporation. Separation involves students' ability to let go of their norms of their old communities. Next the students must enter the transition stage where they find themselves separated from norms of their past lives but have not yet adopted norms from their new environment at college. Incorporation happens when students adjust to and

start living in the culture of their institutions' environment (Tinto, 1975). When students become incorporated into the institution, they also become integrated into the academic and social communities. This integration allows for students to commit to their goals and to the institution. Tinto (1993) emphasized the importance of student involvement, he stated "Involvement with one's peers and with the faculty, both inside and outside of the classroom, is itself positively related to the quality of student effort and in turn to both learning and persistence" (p. 71). Involvement is an approach for students to become socially included with their peers. Students who are members of a community are more likely to commit to their institutions (Tinto, 1975, 1987, 1993).

Tinto's framework is used for this research study because it explains the process of how students with various characteristics enter college and have interactions with their peers that lead to decisions to stay or drop out. This study was developed to address how involvement inside and outside of the classroom can influence students' persistence.

Population and Participants

The population of students was defined as undergraduates who were who were members of GLOs at three institutions located in the Midwestern region of the United States. Participants were recruited with the help of fraternity and sorority life advisors at these institutions. The study specifically aimed for students who were at least 19 years of age and in their second year at the same institution. Advisors reported that 1, 695 individuals at the three institutions fit the criteria for the study. Those that completed the survey comprised the participants in this study. Data were collected from a total of 97 participants from the three Midwestern institutions.

Instrumentation

The survey created was adapted from a survey created by France and Finney (2010) that focused on university mattering. The survey in this study focused on the participants' membership in Greek lettered organizations and enrollment at their institutions. The survey created has statements related to sense of belonging and demographics. For the survey in this study, "college campus" was changed to "my chapter" and "my institution" in order to make it relevant to answer the research questions. The instrumentation developed by France and Finney (2010) were representations of the three components of mattering that were defined by Rosenberg and McCullough. The three components, and accompanying reliability scores, are: awareness (.85) importance (.73), and reliance (.84) (Rosenberg & McCullough as cited in France & Finney, 2010 p. 49). In a study of *Conceptualization and Utility of University Mattering: A Construct Validity*, France and Finney (2010) found a strong positive correlation with the reported feelings students have of awareness and importance and their feelings of university mattering. Participants responded using a 5-point Likert response scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

The survey was created using a software program called Qualtrics. Qualtrics allowed for the survey to be sent out electronically through a link. Before the survey was distributed to the participants, a pilot test was done to ensure clarity of the survey items and that there were no other issues with the link. The pilot test was sent to peers of the researcher who are members of different GLOs. After feedback was received, some changes were made to the layout of the survey. After the survey was updated, the survey

was uploaded into Qualtrics, made available to students through contact with advisors at the three institutions.

Survey Items

This survey for the study has three sections: (a) institution sense of belonging, (b) chapter sense of belonging, and (c) demographics. The section of the survey on institution sense of belonging has eight statements that focus on being a part of their institutions and intentions to remain enrolled. The section of the survey that pertains to chapter sense of belonging has 14 statements that focus on being a part of the chapter and intentions to remain an active member. The third section of the survey addressed eight demographics questions. The statements refer to a sense of belonging to participants' chapters were replicated and addressed sense of belong to their institutions. The statements on the survey addressed the following: (a) level of comfort, (b) others take interest in them, (c) feeling important in their chapter/institution, (d) being recognized for their achievements, and (e) if people in their chapter/institution are invested in their life.

The demographic questions addressed gender, academic class standing, first generation status, family economic description, ethnicity and/or race, residence on campus, name of institution, and affiliation with Greek Council. For the full survey, see Appendix A.

Data Collection

Data were collected from participants by recruiting undergraduate members of GLOs at three Midwestern institutions. Fraternity and sorority life advisors at multiple

institutions were emailed asking for participation in this research study. The first recruitment email explained the importance of this research and how the implications may potentially benefit the advisors in their work. Three fraternity/sorority life advisors granted permission to conduct this research study at their institutions. The advisors were asked to submit a letter of permission from their institution that documented their willingness to participate in this research study. A copy of the IRB approval is found on Appendix B. When the documents were received, the next step was to provide direction to the advisors to distribute the survey to the students. The survey was distributed to all members of GLOs in Interfraternity Council, Panhellenic Association, National Pan-Hellenic Council, and Multicultural Greek Council. The participating advisors at each institution were given two pre-written emails to send out to the participants. The first was an introductory email with the online link to the survey. The second was a reminder email that was to be sent out one week after the first email.

This survey was open to members of all fraternities or sororities in the four following councils: Interfraternity Council, Panhellenic Association, Multicultural Greek Council, and National Pan-Hellenic Council. The survey, made available to a total of 1,695 individuals, was completed by 97 participants from three Midwestern institutions.

Data Analysis

Analysis corresponded to each research question. First, Cronbach's Alpha reliability test was done to check consistency for the measure because sense of belonging is a latent variable. The Cronbach's Alpha measured how closely a set of items are as a group since the scale used in the survey is a grouping of questions to measure a sense of

belonging. The Cronbach Alpha results reassured that answers to each survey item were answered in a consistent manner. Prior to the Cronbach Alpha analysis, four survey items needed to be reverse coded. This process reversed the Likert scale for each item. To verify that each reverse coded item was in the same scale, a cross tabs analysis was conducted, which took the old and the new items and cross-checked them to make sure they were coded correctly. The Cronbach Alpha score of .826 indicated reliability of the consistency of the survey items.

The next step was to calculate the mean for the 14 items in chapter sense of belonging and the eight items in institution sense of belonging. These two means are a composite for all the responses that pertained to each of the categories, chapter and institution. Once the calculations were completed, the next step was to answer the research questions.

Question One: Do (a) first-generation and (b) non-first-generation students who are members of GLOs differ in terms of their sense of belonging to their respective chapters and/or to their institutions?

The means for chapter and institution sense of belonging were subjected to an independent sample t-test, using SPSS, to determine if significant differences existed. The t-test determined the difference between the means of first-generation and non-first-generation students for chapter sense of belong and for institutional sense of belonging. Thus, two independent t-tests were conducted.

Question Two: What is the relationship between the sense of belonging of members to their individual chapters and their sense of belonging to their institution?

To answer the second research question, a Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to determine if there was a significant relationship between participants' sense of belonging to their chapter and to their institution. The correlation expressed the strength and direction of the sense of belonging within a participants' chapter to their sense of belonging to their institution

Question Three: Is the correlation between chapter and institution sense of belonging different for first-generation students compared to non-first-generation students?

A Fisher's Z-transformation test was conducted to analyze the difference between first-generation and non-first-generation students' correlations to sense of belonging to chapter and institution. First, the participants were divided into two groups by first generation status; then, a Pearson correlation for chapter and institution sense of belonging were conducted for each of the groups. A comparison of the correlation coefficients was then conducted to determine if there was significant difference between the two groups. This was done by running a Fisher's Z-transformation test. To conduct a Fisher's Z-transformation test, the two correlation coefficients were transformed into a normal distribution variable for z. This was a two-step process. The first part of the formula for the Fisher's Z-transformation test was to find the z-scores for the two correlations that were conducted. This was done by calculation one-half of the natural logarithm multiplied by one plus the correlation coefficient value for chapter sense of belonging, and then dividing by one minus the correlation coefficient value for institution sense of belonging. Once the z-score was computed, the standard error of difference was calculated. The formula for the Fisher's Z-transformation test was calculated by (a)

taking the z-score for chapter sense of belonging minus institution sense of belonging, and then (b) dividing the difference by the standard error. An alpha score of .1 was used to determine the critical value and the boundaries for the computed z-score from the Fisher's Z-transformation test. The Fisher's Z-transformation test provided evidence of differences between first-generation students and non-first generation students with regard to their correlations between chapter and institution sense of belonging.

Summary

Participants for this study were recruited at three Midwestern Institutions by contacting the fraternity and sorority life advisors. Once data were collected, they were analyzed using SPSS. Two separate independent t-tests were used to answer research question one, which examined the difference of first-generation students and their sense of belonging to their individual chapter and institution. A correlation was conducted to answer research question two. The correlation analyzed the relationship between sense of belonging to an individual's chapter and to their respective institution. Finally, a Fisher's Z-Transformation test was completed to find out if there was a difference in the relationship between first-generation and non-first-generation students' sense of belonging to their chapter and institution.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to compare the experience of first-generation students and non-first-generation students by measuring sense of belonging to their individual GLOs and to their institutions. I explain the results for each research question. First, I provide a description of the demographics of the survey participants. Second, I provide an explanation of the difference between first-generation students and non-first-generation students' to their chapters and institutions sense of belonging through using an independent, two-tailed t-test, and results from the correlation for sense of belonging and institution. Finally, I provide the results from the Fisher's Z-transformation test that determined if the correlation between chapter and institution sense of belonging was different for first-generation and non-first generation students.

Demographics

The survey used eight questions to determine the demographics of the participants in order to provide a profile of the sample that responded to the survey. There were 97 participants who took the survey out of a possible population of 1,695; giving a 5.7% rate of return. There were a total of 21 males and 76 females who participated. The most vital demographic question identified which participants were first-generation students. Of the 97 participants, 28.1% ($n=27$) of participants identified as first-generation, and 71.8% ($n=69$) identified as non-first-generation students. Of this group of 97 that was separated by first-generation status, several demographic variables were computed. Of the participants, 14.8% ($n=4$) of the males were first-generation and

85.2% ($n=23$) of the females were first-generation. Table 4.1 describes race and ethnicity partitioned by first-generation and non-first-generation status and also includes a total percentage. The majority of participants were White/European at a total of 84% ($n=89$) and Hispanic/Latino came in at second with 4.7% ($n=5$) of participants. The full list of race and ethnicities are in Table 4.1, which is below.

Table 4.1

Race & Ethnicity of Participants

| | Non-First- Generation ($n = 69^*$) % | First- Generation ($n = 27^{**}$) % | Total ($n = 97$) % |
|------------------------|---|--|----------------------------|
| Prefer not to disclose | 4.0 | 3.2 | 3.8 |
| Other | 0.0 | 3.2 | 0.9 |
| Bi\Multiracial | 1.3 | 6.5 | 2.8 |
| Pacific Islander | 1.3 | 0.0 | 0.9 |
| White/European | 89.3 | 71.0 | 84.0 |
| Hispanic/Latino | 1.3 | 12.9 | 4.7 |
| African American | 1.3 | 3.2 | 1.9 |
| American Indian/Native | 1.3 | 0.0 | 0.9 |

*69 respondents provided 75 responses

**27 respondents provided 31 responses

Socioeconomic status was the second important demographic. Middle class status was the most reported by participants (53.6%), closely followed by upper middle class

(28.9%). When divided by generation status, 51.9% ($n=14$) of first-generation students reported being in the middle class. Only 3.7% ($n=1$) first-generation students reported being in the low income or poor status. See Table 4.2 below for full details of socioeconomic status of participants displayed by first-generation or non-first generation status.

Table 4.2

Socioeconomic Status of Participants

| | Non-First- Generation ($n = 69^*$) % | First- Generation ($n = 27^{**}$) % | Total ($n = 97$) % |
|--------------------|---|--|----------------------------|
| Wealthy | 4.3 | 0.0 | 3.1 |
| Upper Middle Class | 31.4 | 22.2 | 29.2 |
| Middle Class | 54.3 | 51.9 | 54.2 |
| Working Class | 8.6 | 22.2 | 12.5 |
| Low Income/Poor | 1.4 | 3.7 | 2.1 |

A third demographic of interest was the GLO councils. Of the total number of participants, 92 participants provided data for their councils. Out of the 92 participants, 19.6% ($n=18$) were Panhellenic Council, 25% ($n=23$) were Interfraternity Council, 45.7% ($n=42$) were National Pan-Hellenic Council, and 9.8% ($n=9$) were listed as other. Participants were also asked to identify where they lived, either on or off campus or in housing provided by their GLO. Of the 97 participants, 33% ($n=32$) live in the residence

halls, 22% ($n=21$) live in chapter housing, and 45% ($n=44$) live off campus. These demographics provided a picture of the sample that took the survey. All demographic data were self-reported by the participants.

Results

The following sections review the results corresponding to each research question for this study.

Question One: Do first-generation and non-first-generation students who are members of GLOs differ in terms of their sense of belonging to their respective chapters and/or to their institutions?

In order to answer this question, an independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare the sense of belonging for both the participants' chapter and institution for first-generation and non-first-generation students. Out of the 97 participants, two individuals did not complete the survey far enough for their data to be used in this analysis. A total of 95 participants' data is used in this t-test. No statistically significant difference in the scores for first-generation students ($M=4.36$, $SD=.56$) and non-first-generation students ($M=4.2340$, $SD=.57482$) for chapter sense of belonging; $t(93)$, $p=.351$. Thus the null hypothesis was not rejected. These results suggest that there was no difference in first-generation and non-first-generation students in their levels of sense of belonging to their respective GLO chapter.

Out of the 97 participants, one individual did not complete the survey far enough for their data to be used in this analysis. A total of 96 participants' data is used in this t-test. No statistically significant difference in the scores for first-generation students

($M=4.3009$, $SD=.40912$) and non-first-generation students ($M=4.2047$, $SD=.51448$) for institution sense of belonging; $t(94)$, $p=.387$. The null hypothesis was not rejected.

These results suggest that there was no difference for first-generation and non-first-generation students in the levels of sense of belonging to their respective institutions.

Question Two: What is the relationship between the sense of belonging of members to their individual chapters and their sense of belonging to their institution?

In order to answer this question, a Pearson's correlation was computed to assess the relationship between chapter and institution sense of belonging. Out of the 97 participants, two individuals did not complete the survey far enough for their data to be used in this analysis. A total of 95 participants' data is used in this Pearson correlation. There was a positive weak correlation between the two variables ($r=.332$, $n=95$, $p=.001$). Overall, there was a positive weak correlation between the sense of belonging in the participants' chapter and their sense of belonging to their institution. The null hypothesis was rejected. A positive correlation indicates that there is a relationship between the participants' chapter and institution sense of belonging.

Question Three: Is the correlation between chapter and institution sense of belonging different for first-generation students compared to non-first-generation students?

Two Pearson correlations were conducted to analyze the correlation between chapter and institution sense of belonging for first-generation and non-first-generation students. Out of the 97 participants, two individuals did not complete the survey far enough for their data to be used in this analysis. A total of 95 participants' data is used in this Pearson correlations and the Fisher's Z-test. For non-first-generation students, there

was a positive correlation between chapter sense of belonging and institution sense of belonging ($r=.448$, $n=69$, $p<.001$). For non-first-generation students, their chapter sense of belonging increases and their institutional sense of belonging increases. For first-generation students, there was a negative, weak correlation between chapter sense of belonging and institution sense of belonging ($r=-.087$, $n=26$, $p=.672$). Two observations should be noted. First, the negative value indicates a tendency for first-generation students' chapter sense of belonging to increase as their institutional sense of belonging decreases. Second, the p value of .672 indicates that the correlation for first-generation students was not statistically significant. First-generation students do not have a statistically significant relationship with chapter and institution sense of belonging. The correlation could be a result of this particular sample and not representative of the population.

To determine the difference between these two Pearson correlations, Fisher's Z-transformation test was conducted. The Fisher Z-transformation compared the correlation coefficients to see if they were significantly different from one another. The z-score of the difference was 2.35 with a p value of .0192. The null hypothesis was rejected. Thus, there was a significant difference between the two correlations for first-generation and non-first generation students in their chapter and institution sense of belonging.

Summary

This chapter described the research results obtained from analyzing the collected data. Appropriate statistical analysis was applied to the data to provide answers to three

research questions regarding chapter and institution sense of belonging for first-generation and non-first-generation students. To summarize the findings, there was no statistically significant difference in the chapter and institution sense of belonging for first-generation and non-first-generation students who were members of Greek lettered organizations. However, there was a positive weak correlation between the sense of belonging in the participants' chapter and their sense of belonging to their institution. Lastly, a difference exists between the two correlations for first-generation and non-first generation students in their chapter and institution sense of belonging. The results indicated that there was a positive correlation for non-first-generation and no correlation for first-generation students. Chapter 5 includes a discussion of results, implications for practice, and limitations of this study.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

This chapter provides an overall summary of the study. I provide a restatement of the research questions and the purpose statement, an overview of the methods used for data collection and analysis and a discussion for the findings from Chapter 4. Implications for theory and practice are outlined. I also provide a discussion of the limitations of the study and recommendations for future research. As demonstrated in Chapters 1 and 2, there is very little research on first-generation students' experiences in GLOs and how those experiences might relate to persistence. Tinto's (1987, 1993) theory of student departure suggests that involvement is a key piece to student persistence but does not address the differences for first-generation students. Lofink and Paulsen (2005) found that if first-generation students do not find other students with the same interests, they will not make connections and may be more likely to drop out of college. In this study, I analyzed sense of belonging to chapter and institution for first-generation and non-first-generation members of GLOs.

Restatement of Research Questions

As stated in Chapter 1, the purpose of this study was to compare the experiences of first-generation students and non-first-generation students by measuring their sense of belonging to their individual GLOs and to their institutions. Three questions were developed to analyze the relationship between first-generation students and their sense of belonging to their chapters and their institutions.

Question One

Do first-generation and non-first-generation students who are members of GLOs differ in terms of their sense of belonging to their respective chapters and/or to their institutions?

Question Two

What is the relationship between the sense of belonging of members to their individual chapters and their sense of belonging to their institution?

Question Three

Is the correlation between chapter and institution sense of belonging different for first-generation students compared to non-first-generation students?

Methods and Procedures

Data were collected from 97 participants from three different Midwestern institutions of higher education. From the data, 28.1% (n=27) were identified as first-generation and 71.8% (n=69) were identified as non-first-generation. There were a total of 21 males and 76 females and the majority of the participants identified as White/European at 84% (n=89).

The fraternity and sorority life advisors gave permission to conduct research on their campuses. The advisors were sent the link to the online survey that was e-mailed to every member of a GLO on their campus, which was a total of 1,695 students. The survey used in this study was adapted from a measure created by France and Finney (2010) for university mattering. The only changes made to the survey in this study were to change the term “college campus” to “my chapter” and “my institution.” Participants

answered the survey items using a Likert scale that measured their sense of belonging to their chapter and institution. The survey also consisted of eight demographics questions.

Data were collected and research questions were analyzed. To determine a statistically significant difference with first-generation and non-first-generation students' sense of belonging to chapters and institutions, two independent, two-tailed t-tests was conducted, one for differences for GLO belonging and one for institutional belonging. The t-test first compared the sense of belonging to chapters and a second t-test compared sense of belonging to institutions for first-generation and non-first-generation students. Next, a Pearson's correlation was conducted to analyze the correlation between sense of belonging to the chapter in relation to the institution for all participants. Lastly, a Fisher's Z-transformation test was computed to compare the correlation coefficients of chapter and institution sense of belonging to determine statistical significant difference between first-generation and non-first-generation students.

Discussion of Results

I discuss the findings from the research questions in this section. Discussion of the results presents a connection to the literature mentioned in Chapter 2. Theoretical and practical implications are presented for higher education professionals and areas for future researched are discussed.

Demographics

Participants were divided into two groups by first-generation and non-first-generation student status. A study by Stebleton and Soria (2012) found that many first-generation students must hold jobs; those responsibilities may interfere with their

academic success at their institutions. Since there was not a question on the survey in this study to identify if participants' held jobs, they were asked to identify their families' socioeconomic status. Out of the participants who identified as first-generation, no one selected "wealthy" as an option. The majority of first-generation participants selected "middle class" or "working class" at a combined total of 74.1% ($n=20$). Non-first-generation students had combined total of "middle class" and "working class" of 62.9% ($n=44$). First-generation and non-first-generation students' socioeconomic status is important to mention because their backgrounds are considered an input characteristic that they bring them to the institution, and it is a trait that they will carry with them as they become integrated into the institution (Tinto, 1975).

Difference in Chapter and Institution Sense of Belonging

The findings from research question one indicated no statistically significant difference in the scores for first-generation students and non-first-generation students for chapter and institution sense of belonging. The null hypothesis cannot be rejected. These results suggest no difference in first-generation and non-first-generation students in their levels of sense of belonging to their respective GLO chapters or institutions. Despite no difference in chapter and institution sense of belonging, participants on average still responded that they agreed or strongly agreed that they had a sense of belonging to chapter and institution.

However, participants on average had a sense of belonging to their chapter and institution. This finding of no difference between groups supports prior research in that membership in a social organization establishes a sense of belonging within the group.

Hurtado and Carter (1997) found that students in a social organization had the highest sense of belonging when compared to other types of organizations. The chapter sense of belonging from the participants in this study could have been established because the participants found a group of other students who have similar interests. Berger and Milem (1997) found that when students find groups who align with their own interests, they become socially integrated and find support through the organization. The social interaction that takes place within members of GLOs creates connections between students. Social integration builds relationships between members and facilitates students to become integrated with the campus culture (Tinto, 1975).

The participants in this study have established social membership through their feelings of sense of belonging to their chapter. Through this social membership, researchers have found that students who are involved create meaning with the relationships that are built between the members of their organizations. The participants in this study on average reported that they agreed or strongly agreed that they have a sense of belonging to their institution. Referring to Strayhorn (2012), the feelings that are established by a sense of belonging help enhance students' retention to the institution. Membership in an organization helps influence a sense of belonging. These findings support previous literature presented in Chapter 2.

I expected to find a difference in the chapter and institution sense of belonging for first-generation and non-first-generation students because first-generation students face different barriers for social integration compared to non-first-generation students. I say this because Chen and Carroll (2005) found that first-generation students are less likely to

be an invested in their educational experiences compared to non-first-generation students. It has also been found that first-generation students struggle with navigating the campus culture and do not understand what it means to be a college student. Because first-generation students struggle with being under involved and not finding other students who are similar to them, they experience feelings of loneliness and isolation. According to this research, I would have expected the first-generation students in this study to have a difference in their average for chapter and institution sense of belonging.

I am pleasantly surprised that there was no significant difference that was found with first-generation and non-first-generation students' sense of belonging to chapter and institution. According to Strayhorn (2012), involvement helps students create connections with others and affirms their values to establish a sense of belonging within the group. The findings from research question support prior research on involvement and a sense of belonging. Interestingly in this study there was no difference between first-generation students and non-first-generation students' sense of belonging to chapters and institutions.

Relationship to Chapter and Institution Sense of Belonging

There was a positive weak correlation between the sense of belonging in the participants' chapters and their sense of belonging to their institutions. Even a slight correlation in this study helps to support Tinto's (1975, 1987, 1993) Theory of student departure. Being a member of GLOs is a form a social involvement on a college campus, and Tinto (1993) suggests that involvement is a key piece to social integration. When students become socially integrated, they build connections with others on campus. The

relationships built between members shape a commitment to each other and to the institution because students are less likely to leave because of the relationships they have established (Tinto, 1975, 1987, 1993). Because the participants in this study are socially involved with an organization on their campuses, they have more interactions that take place at their institutions thus creating a connection to the campus environment (Tinto, 1993).

The findings of this study also support previous research that states involvement creates a sense of belonging to the campus. Involvement on a college campus helps to establish a sense of belonging because of the perceived support students receive (Strayhorn, 2012). The correlation found in this study between chapter and institution sense of belonging also supports previous research suggesting students who are involved in GLOs are less likely to leave their institution because of the positive impact their membership has on their sense of belonging in college (Astin, 1975; DeBard et al., 2006; Willingham, 1972). When students are members of social organizations there is a meaning established within that community that places value on their decision to stay at the institution (Tinto, 1987). Because the results of this study show that there is a statistically significant correlation between sense of belonging to chapter and institution, the participants in this study have developed an attachment to their institutions through their membership in their GLOs.

The participants in this study on average agreed or strongly agreed that they have a sense of belonging to both their chapters and their institutions. The results of research question two help to support previous research by Strayhorn (2012) that suggests that

students who are involved on campus have a stronger connection to their institutions compared to students who are not involved. The correlation between chapter and institution sense of belonging also supports findings by Winston and Saunders (1987) that suggests students who invest their energy with their campus environment through organizations develop an attachment to their institution.

Relationship Difference

The results from research question three found that a difference exists between the two correlations for first-generation and non-first generation students in their chapter and institution sense of belonging. Non-first-generation students have a stronger significant correlation between chapter sense of belonging and institution sense of belonging. This finding supports previous research that membership in a GLO has a positive effect on the outcomes of students' experience in college. Membership in GLOs assist students in the relationship they have with their campus (Winston, Nettles III, & Opper, 1987). This finding suggests that non-first-generation students have a positive relationship with their chapter and institution sense of belonging.

The opposite is true for first-generation students. There was no significant correlation between their chapter and institution sense of belonging. However, first-generation students on average agreed or strongly agreed that they have a sense of belonging to chapter and institution, but there is no significant correlation between chapter and institution sense of belonging.

The findings for the correlation for first-generation students' chapter and institution sense of belonging contradict existing research that involvement in an

organization on campus increases the commitment to the institution (Tinto, 1987, 1993). Membership in a GLO might help first-generation students navigate the landscape of the campus and feel supported by their institution. The relationships that are established through membership of an organization help first-generation students by their peers providing support and guidance on their college campuses (Santos & Riegasdas, 2004). The participants in this study may not be establishing the connection between memberships in a GLO with a relationship to their institutions. This study did not analyze reasons why first-generation students do have not a significant correlation with chapter and institution sense of belonging, but previous literature can provide some suggestions on how involvement creates a relationship with the institution. According to Tinto (1987, 1993), students must become incorporated into the institution by means of social integration. The participants in this study may not be reaching the incorporation stage of Tinto's (1993) theory. The primary component of incorporation requires students to adopt the norms and culture of their institution.

First-generation students in this study are not establishing the meaning to their institution through their membership in their GLO and this finding contradicts Tinto's (1987,1993) research. Non-first-generation students are establishing the connection that supports previous research. Because there is a large difference in the correlations between first-generation and non-first generation students, further research must be done to understand how and where this relationship is not forming.

Implications

The findings of this study provide several implications for professional staff on college campuses. There are both theoretical and practical implications presented.

Theoretical

The results of this study provide several theoretical implications. Tinto's (1975, 1987, 1993) theory of student departure suggests that students who are socially integrated into their institutions by means of involvement will persist. Other past research also supports this theory. The findings of this research study support that membership in a GLO has a relationship to institution sense of belonging. The correlation found in this study provides a linkage to involvement in an organization and a commitment to the institution. The findings in this study support research by Strayhorn (2012) that suggests social involvement can influence a student's sense of belonging on campus. This institution sense of belonging created by the positive relationships built students' peers.

However, this relationship of chapter and institution sense of belonging is different for first-generation and non-first-generation students because there is no significant correlation for first-generation students' chapter and institution relationship. Presented in the critiques of Tinto's (1975, 1987, 1993) Theory of student departure, Museus (2014) suggests that students who are identified as a minority are not accounted for in Tinto's theory. There was a more diverse sample for first-generation students in this study. Tinto's framework might not have fit their experiences at their institutions. Students who come from a more diverse background might find it more difficult to separate from their past to adapt to the culture of the campus. The first-generation

students in this study may have found a safe place to be themselves within their chapters, but do not feel that their membership afford them the same feelings to their institutions. For first-generation students in this study, membership in a GLO does not have a relationship with institution sense of belonging.

Practical

The findings from this study provide useful suggestions for practitioners of student affairs and fraternity and sorority life advisors. The results found no statistically significant difference exists between first-generation and non-first generation students in their chapter and institution sense of belonging. Findings provide evidence for fraternity and sorority life advisors to increase their efforts on recruiting first-generation students. The findings suggest membership in GLOs provide a community for first-generation students to feel a sense of belonging. First-generation students in this study do have a sense of belonging to their chapters. Sense of belonging to students' chapter is important because involvement influences social integration through relationships among members.

The correlation of the relationship of sense of belonging to chapter and to institution is very important for student affairs practitioners. The findings suggest that involvement creates a sense of belonging in both students' respective chapters and provides a connection to their institutions. This finding of the relationship to sense of belonging to chapter and to institution is important for fraternity and sorority life advisors to build strong communities on their campuses because membership in a GLO has the ability to keep students retained at the institution. Students who are members of GLOs

also feel they that belong to their institutions and the feelings that developed are key factors with persistence (Strayhorn, 2012).

However, the data for first-generation students in this study do not indicate a statistically significant correlation between chapter and institution sense of belonging. These findings contradict previous literature. The results of this study did not provide reasons why first-generation students are not establishing this connection to their institutions through membership in their GLOs. Implications for fraternity and sorority life advisors may be to develop a community on campus that makes first-generation students feel more at home at the institution. First-generation students have different needs compared to non-first-generation students. GLOs should feel like a home for first-generation students because Woosley and Shepler (2001) suggest that campus environment influences first-generation students. Fraternity and sorority life advisors should also create communities that allow first-generation students to bring their cultures from home with them into the culture of their chapters. This would allow first-generation students not to straddle between two cultures. Hsiao (1992) suggests that many first-generation students experience discomfort when they separate themselves from their past to become college students.

Another suggestion for fraternity and sorority life advisors is to encourage involvement in leadership positions within the Greek community. The results of this study indicate that first-generation students are not establishing a sense of belonging to their institutions through their membership in their GLOs. Research suggests that involvement is a component for student persistence. First-generation students who

increase their levels of involvement within their chapters and the Greek community could increase their correlation between sense of belonging to their chapters and institutions. Most importantly, all professional staff at institutions should make their campuses feel welcoming and supportive to first-generation students so that first-generation students feel that they belong on campus.

Limitations

Several limitations emerged throughout the course of this study. There were limitations that were known about the design and size of this study prior to data collection. These limitations were taken into consideration during the data collection and analysis. There were also unforeseen limitations that were discovered during data analysis. This section will describe each of these limitations.

Research Design

The design of this study was limited because of the number of institutions that agreed to participate in this study. Over fifteen institutions across the Midwest were recruited; however, only three institutions agreed and participated in this study. This was the first limitation in this study. The next limitation was the response rate. Out of the institutions that participated, the survey was sent to 1,695 students and only 97 students took the survey, giving this study a small response rate of 5.7 %. This small sample size is not very generalizable to the larger population. Out of the 97 students, only 27 identified as first-generation. The low number of 27 was just enough to compare differences between first-generation and non-first generation participants. However, this significant difference in quantities could have influenced some of the results because

there was the ratio of 3:1 for non-first-generation participants. Lastly, most of the participants were from the same institution. One institution only had six participants. Because of the low responses rate, a different method is suggested.

Unforeseen

There were a few unforeseen limitations of this study. First being the small number of first-generation students to participate in this study. The majority of the participants were non-first-generation that may have had some influence in the analysis of the data. There was a three to one ratio of non-first-generation students to first-generation students. The small response rate could be a reason for this limitation, or there were not many first-generation students who are members of GLOs.

Not all of the participants completed the survey in its entirety. This provided different total numbers for demographics, independent t-tests, and correlations. Out of 97 participants, 97 individuals answered demographic questions and only 92 identified their Greek Council. Data from 95 participants were used for the Pearson correlations that were conducted and one t-test. Participants' responses were recorded and kept due to the small sample size.

Another limitation in this study is that the survey question that identified Greek Council resulted in confusion of the participants. A few participants were not sure what the question asked and did not answer or could have answered incorrectly. Each institution also has different names for the Greek Councils on their campuses; this is another reason for the confusion. This demographic variable was not useful in the study because of the mixed results.

Areas for Future Research

Research on the experiences of first-generation students who are members of GLOs is limited. Because there is not much research on this topic, the opportunities for future research are abundant. More research studies should address why there was no significant difference found between the sense of belonging to chapter and institution for first-generation and non-first-generation students. Perhaps research could investigate if first-generation students are involved in other organizations on campus and what membership in these organizations means to them in terms of their sense of belonging. This study did not ask participants if they were involved with anything else at their respective institutions.

Another area for future research is to focus only on first-generation students who are both members of a GLO and who are not. This could provide an interesting perspective of the difference in sense of belonging to the institutions for first-generation students and if there, sense of belonging is greater because they are a member of a GLO. This could help understand why there is no statistical significance in the difference between first-generation and non-first-generation students' sense of belonging to chapter and institution. Only comparing first-generation students' experiences with involvement on campus and sense of belonging could help produce for evidence for other research theories such as Tinto's (1987, 1993) theory of student departure, Astin's (1984) theory of student involvement, and Strayhorn's (2012) model for sense of belonging.

Conclusion

The findings of this study show that there needs to be more research on first-generation students' membership in GLOs. This study supported previous research that involvement in a GLO does have a strong sense of belonging for first-generation and non-first-generation students; however, there is no significant correlation for institution sense of belonging for first-generation students. This relationship needs to be further to understand what makes first-generation students join a GLO and why it does not create a relationship to a belonging to their institution. This study also provides implications for student affairs professionals who work with first-generation students and members of GLOs. The findings of this study inform these professionals to build a strong community in their GLOs on their campuses and reach out to first-generation students to bridge the gap in the relationship between their membership in a GLO and their sense of belonging to the greater campus community.

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APPENDIX A

SURVEY



Q1

Participant Informed Consent Form

IRB#

Title:

There is a difference in the sense of belonging for first-generation students who are members of Greek Lettered Organization?

Purpose:

The purpose of this study is to compare the experience of first-generation students and non-first-generation students by measuring their sense of belonging to their individual Greek Lettered Organizations and to their institution.

Participants:

You must be at least 19 years of age and a second year student at your college/university.

Procedures:

You will be asked to take an online survey. The procedures will last for 10-15 minutes.

Participants:

You must be at least 19 years of age and a second year student at your college/university.

Benefits:

There are no direct benefits to you as a research participant.

Risks and/or Discomforts:



There are no known risks or discomforts associated with this research.

Confidentiality:

The data will be collected via an anonymous survey with no identifiable information to be collected. The data will be stored on the primary researcher's password protected laptop and will only be seen by the investigator during the study and for two years after the study is complete. The information obtained in this study may be published in journals or presented at meetings but the data will be reported as aggregated data.

Compensation:

You will receive no compensation for participating in this project.

Opportunity to Ask Questions:

You may ask any questions concerning this research and have those questions answered before agreeing to participate in or during the study. Or you may contact the investigator(s) at the phone numbers below. Please contact the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Institutional Review Board at (402) 472-6965 to voice concerns about the research or if you have any questions about your rights as a research participant.

Freedom to Withdraw:

Participation in this study is voluntary. You can refuse to participate or withdraw at any time without harming your relationship with the researchers or the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, or in any other way receive a penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Consent, Right to Receive a Copy:

You are voluntarily making a decision whether or not to participate in this research study.



Name and Phone number of investigator(s)

Samantha Martens, Principal Investigator smartens@huskers.unl.edu (630) 220-9159

Elizabeth Niehaus, Ph.D., Secondary Investigator eniehaus@unl.edu

Q2

I have read and understood the above consent form and desire of my own free will to participate in this study.

Yes (1)

No (2)

If No Is Selected, Then Skip To End of Survey

Q3 For the following statements regarding your college, please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree

| | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neither Agree nor Disagree | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|--|-------------------|----------|----------------------------|-------|----------------|
| The people of my campus pay attention to me (1) | | | | | |
| I feel a member of the campus community (2) | | | | | |
| I would choose the same college over again (3) | | | | | |
| I feel comfortable on campus (4) | | | | | |
| My contributions will benefit my college campus (5) | | | | | |
| I know that people on my college campus are interested in me (6) | | | | | |
| I intend on staying at my current college (7) | | | | | |

| | | | | | |
|--|--|--|--|--|--|
| I intend on graduating from my current college (8) | | | | | |
|--|--|--|--|--|--|

Q4 For the following statements regarding your fraternity or sorority chapter, please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree

| | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neither Agree nor Disagree | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|--|-------------------|----------|----------------------------|-------|----------------|
| I intend to stay an active member on my chapter (1) | | | | | |
| I know people in my chapter are sincerely interested in me. (2) | | | | | |
| The people in my chapter pay attention to me (3) | | | | | |
| There are people in my chapter who would also experience my disappointment if I didn't reach my full potential (4) | | | | | |
| The people in my chapter are invested in my life (5) | | | | | |

No one in my chapter depends on me (6)

When I have a problem, people in my chapter usually don't want to hear about it (7)

The people in my chapter tend to rely on me for support (8)

At my chapter's social gatherings, no one recognizes me (9)

Often the people in my chapter trust me with things that are important to them (10)

There is no one in my chapter who really takes pride in my accomplishments (11)

| | | | | | |
|---|--|--|--|--|--|
| There are people in my chapter who care enough about me to give me feedback when I need it (12) | | | | | |
| I feel that I have a good group of friends in my chapter (13) | | | | | |
| I call my chapter a home away from home (14) | | | | | |

- Q5
What is your gender
- Male (1)
 - Female (2)
 - Transgender (3)
 - Other (4) _____

- Q6 What is your class standing?
- Freshman (1)
 - Sophomore (2)
 - Junior (3)
 - Senior (4)

- Q7
Which of the following describes your family?
- Wealthy (1)
 - Upper-middle class/professional middle class (2)
 - Middle Class (3)
 - Working Class (4)
 - Low-income or poor (5)

Q8 Which explains your parent(s) or legal guardian(s) educational background?

- At least one has a bachelor's degree or higher (1)
- None has a bachelor's degree or higher (2)

Q9 Please indicate your race or ethnicity. Select all that apply

- American Indian or Alaska Native (1)
- African American, Black, Afro-Caribbean, African (2)
- Hispanic or Latin (3)
- Asian or East Asian (4)
- Middle-Eastern or Arab (5)
- Non-Hispanic White or European (6)
- South Asian or Indian (7)
- Pacific Islander (8)
- Bi/Multiracial (9)
- Other (10) _____
- Prefer not to disclose (11)

Q10 Which of the following describes your current living situation?

- On campus in residence hall (1)
- Chapter housing (2)
- Off Campus (3)

Q11 Which council represents your chapter?

- Panhellenic Association (1)
- Interfraternity Council (2)
- Multicultural Greek Council (3)
- National Pan-Hellenic Council (4)
- Other, please fill in (5) _____

Q12 Which college are you from?

- University of Illinois at Chicago (1)
- University of Northern Iowa (2)
- University of Minnesota (3)

APPENDIX B

IRB APPROVAL



Official Approval Letter for IRB project #15733 - New Project Form

January 12, 2016

Samantha Martens
Department of Educational Administration

Elizabeth Niehaus
Department of Educational Administration
133 TEAC, UNL, 68588-0360

IRB Number: 20151215733EX

Project ID: 15733

Project Title: There is a difference in the sense of belonging for first-generation students who are members of Greek Lettered Organization?

Dear Samantha:

This letter is to officially notify you of the certification of exemption of your project for the Protection of Human Subjects. Your proposal is in compliance with this institution's Federal Wide Assurance 00002258 and the DHHS Regulations for the Protection of Human Subjects (45 CFR 46) and has been classified as exempt.

You are authorized to implement this study as of the Date of Final Exemption: 12/02/2015

- o Review conducted using exempt category 2 at 45 CFR 46.101
- o Date of Exemption: 12/02/2015
- o Funding: N/A

Please submit documentation to verify approval from each participating institutions Greek Office Director OR each institutions IRB approval or deferral. This documentation should be submitted to Lindsey Arneson at larneson2@unl.edu.

You have approval to conduct research at the following institutions:

1. University of Northern Iowa (12/02/2015)
2. Western Illinois University (1/12/2016)
3. Illinois College (1/21/2016)

We wish to remind you that the principal investigator is responsible for reporting to this Board any of the following events within 48 hours of the event:

- * Any serious event (including on-site and off-site adverse events, injuries, side effects, deaths, or other problems) which in the opinion of the local investigator was unanticipated, involved risk to subjects or others, and was possibly related to the research procedures;
- * Any serious accidental or unintentional change to the IRB-approved protocol that involves risk or has the potential to recur;
- * Any publication in the literature, safety monitoring report, interim result or other finding that indicates an unexpected change to the risk/benefit ratio of the research;
- * Any breach in confidentiality or compromise in data privacy related to the subject or others; or
- * Any complaint of a subject that indicates an unanticipated risk or that cannot be resolved by the research staff.

This project should be conducted in full accordance with all applicable sections of the IRB Guidelines and you should notify the IRB immediately of any proposed changes that may affect the exempt status of your research project. You should report any unanticipated problems involving risks to the participants or others to the Board.

If you have any questions, please contact the IRB office at 402-472-6965.

Sincerely,

Becky R. Freeman, CIP
for the IRB

