

# Effects of Greek Membership on Academic Integrity, Alcohol Abuse, and Risky Sexual Behavior at a Small College

David Eberhardt  
N. Dewaine Rice  
Lisa D. Smith



*The purpose of this study was to examine differences in alcohol abuse, sexual behaviors, and academic integrity among Greek and non-Greek students at a small, church-affiliated, liberal arts campus; and further, to compare any differences between Greek men and Greek women. The results of this study were then compared to previous findings at larger, public universities. Results indicated that Greek students tend to experience more problems related to alcohol abuse, were more likely to fabricate sources, but were similar to non-Greek students in their neglect of safe-sex behaviors and in their frequency of cheating on exams. Both Greek men and Greek women reported more alcohol use than their non-Greek counterparts, and Greek men reported more use and more negative secondary effects of alcohol than Greek women. The results provide partial support for considering institutional context when examining the effects of student subcultures such as Greek organizations.*

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David Eberhardt is the assistant dean of students for Community Development at Jacksonville University, N. Dewaine Rice is an associate professor at The University of Memphis, and Lisa D. Smith is a graduate assistant at The University of Memphis.

Previous research indicates that many problems exist within the cultures of fraternities and sororities on American college campuses (Pascarella, Edison, Whitt, Nora, Hagedorn, & Terenzini, 1996; Wechsler, Kuh, & Davenport, 1996). Binge drinking, unsafe sexual practices, and cheating on tests are reported as frequent occurrences within sororities and fraternities (Elias, Bell, Eade, & Underwood, 1996; Kellogg, 1999; McCabe & Bowers, 1996; Tampo, 1990; Wechsler, Kuh, & Davenport, 1996). News reports of incidents such as alcohol-related deaths resulting from fraternity activities provide face validity to these findings. Given these apparent problems, some officials in higher education have called for tighter controls or even the removal of fraternal organizations from colleges (Maisel, 1990). Others have suggested that further in-depth studies of Greek problems are needed to determine the most effective methods of dealing with these social organizations (Neuberger & Hanson, 1997).

Alcohol abuse and unsafe sexual activity may be the most commonly identified problematic issues within Greek organizations. From their extensive review of the literature, Danielson, Taylor, and Hartford (2001) concluded that the Greek subculture is significantly different from the general student population in that drinking attitudes and behaviors are embedded in the physical, cognitive, emotional, and cultural aspects of Greek students' lives. Tampo (1990) discovered that Greeks reported drinking approximately twice as much alcohol per month as their non-Greek peers. In a similar study on binge drinking, Wechsler, Kuh, and Davenport (1996) indicated that Greek students were significantly more likely to consume unsafe amounts of alcohol than their non-Greek peers; and reported alcohol-related problems, such as missing class, injury to themselves, and risky sexual behavior, much more frequently than non-Greek students.

Pace and McGrath (2002) also reported that Greek students drank more than other students who were active in volunteer organizations. However, the negative side effects of drinking, such as hangovers and driving while intoxicated, were not shown to be different between the two groups.

Conversely, Larimer, Irvine, Kilmer, and Marlatt (1997) concluded that becoming intoxicated and putting oneself at risk for academic or sexual consequences is an acceptable part of life in a fraternity or

sorority. While Greeks may engage in more alcohol-related risky sexual behavior, Chng and Moore (1994) found that all groups of students (whether Greek or non-Greek) were comparable in their neglect of safe-sex behaviors. They concluded that the problem was significant for every category of students.

Academic dishonesty is another area of concern associated with Greek-affiliated students. Research questioning whether the exclusive, secretive culture of Greek organizations encourages cheating behavior among members found that higher levels of academic dishonesty were indeed significantly correlated with membership in fraternities and sororities (McCabe & Bowers, 1996; McCabe & Trevino, 1997). This same study reported behaviors such as cheating on tests, allowing others to cheat, and plagiarism existed at higher levels for Greek students.

## Gender

Research has supported the notion that differences in alcohol use and sexual behaviors exist according to gender (Alva, 1998; Read, Wood, Davidoff, McLacken, & Campbell, 2002; Werner-Wilson & Vosburg, 1998). Read et al. (2002) found that when combined with an intention to affiliate with Greek organizations, perceived drinking norms were significantly different between men and women. Perceived norms were a significant predictor of drinking problems for both men and women, but the association was stronger for men. Alva (1998) reported that Greek men and women had significantly higher self-reported incidents of alcohol use than non-Greeks. Further, fraternity members reported significantly lower levels of weekly and monthly alcohol use than sorority members. In their research on sexual attitudes and preferences of undergraduate men and women, Werner-Wilson and Vosberg (1998) concluded that men and women take different paths to unsafe sexual practices.

## Institutional Context

The different types of institutions in American higher education offer distinct environments that influence students in diverse ways (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). The norms of student subcultures both affect and are affected by the insti-

tutional culture (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Student subcultures are also affected by the presence of other vibrant subcommunities, such as those in residence halls (Kuh & Lyons, 1990). Research examining Greek issues as they relate to institutional context has been lacking.

Since the influence of a peer group on its members increases when the size of the institution is large and the group has a relatively small number of members (Newcomb, 1962 as cited in Kuh, 1993), institutional size may be of particular importance. Kuh and Lyons (1990) reported that none of the small, predominantly residential “Involving Colleges” in their college experience study had fraternities or sororities. Furthermore, these colleges pointed to the absence of fraternal organizations as an important factor contributing to the high quality of campus life, and they felt fraternities and sororities were incompatible with the institutions’ mission. Kuh and Lyons concluded that while Greek organizations may compensate for the impersonal scale of institutional life at a large university, their presence at small colleges seems to detract from the quality of the undergraduate experience (Kuh & Lyons, 1990).

Previous studies comparing Greeks and non-Greeks either collected data only at large, public institutions or gathered it on a national scale without differentiating the results according to type of institution. Substantial differences may exist at colleges involved in previous studies between collegiate cultures and student cultures, including Greek organizations. (Kuh, 1993). Combining these students into one data set can leave differences undiscovered and possibly hide important findings.

In their examination of cognitive effects of Greek affiliation, Pascarella, Flowers, and Whitt (2001) controlled for institutional context by including a variable that accounted for academic preparation, as well as 14 other variables. While carefully including various institutional types they did not draw conclusions based on institutional context.

The purpose of this study was to examine differences in alcohol abuse, sexual behaviors, and academic integrity among Greek and non-Greek men and women at a small, church-affiliated, liberal arts campus; and further, to compare any distinctions with previous findings at larger,

public institutions. Such data could be meaningful for student affairs administrators as they attempt to develop effective programs that respond to subculture issues inside and outside of Greek life.

## Method

### Participants

This study was conducted at a church-affiliated, liberal arts college in the South, enrolling about 1,000 students, at which 24% of the students belonged to predominantly White Greek organizations. Two hundred forty-seven students volunteered to participate, including 109 Greek-affiliated participants, and 138 non-Greeks. Ninety-three participants were men; 154 were women. Sixty-two freshmen, 41 sophomores, 79 juniors, and 65 seniors volunteered. The age range was 18 to 24 for most participants; ten volunteers were adult students (over 25 years of age before enrolling at the institution). Two hundred eleven students were White, 29 Black, and 7 Asian/international students. None of the Greek students in the current study belonged to traditional Black Greek-letter organizations. One hundred fifty-nine participants were campus residents; 88 lived off-campus.

### Instruments

The National College Health Assessment (NCHA) (American College Health Association [ACHA], 2000) measured alcohol abuse and sexual behavior. The NCHA was given to students as part of a larger survey sponsored by the institution's health services, and as part of a larger national study conducted by ACHA. Reliability was examined in three previous studies using Cronbach's alpha and varied from .78 to .84 for the entire NCHA survey. The specific scales of the NCHA used to measure alcohol-related behaviors and sexual behaviors were somewhat lower, ranging from .23 to .69. Substantial construct validity was also reported.

The Academic Integrity Survey (AIS) is a self-report survey developed by McCabe and Trevino (1997). The AIS questions students' attitudes about cheating and types of cheating behavior. Participants rate their frequency of cheating behaviors on a 1 to 5 Likert-type scale from

“Never” to “Many Times.” Limited reliability and validity data were available, but Cronbach’s alpha for this measure was reported as .83. Attitudes on cheating included a question about what a participant does when a classmate cheats. Response choices were as follows: (a) report the student to the proper authority; (b) ask the student to report, but report if they do not; (c) express disapproval, but not report; (d) talk to other students about it, but not report; or (e) ignore the cheating incident.

Types of cheating behavior were determined by creating four categories combining like items. The categories were: Copying and Cheating (3 items), Plagiarism (4 items), Fabrication of Sources (1 item), and Obtaining Unpermitted Help (2 items). Using the original 1 to 5 scale, scores were combined into three frequency categories of Never, Rarely, or Sometimes. If participants rated themselves with a 4 or 5 on any of the items within the four broad categories, they were placed in the “Sometimes” category. If participants rated themselves with a 2 or 3, but not a 4 or 5 on any of the items within the four categories, they were placed in the “Rarely” category. If the participants put a 1 on every question within each of the four categories, they were classified as “Never.”

## Procedures

Students were recruited through professors, athletic staff members, and Greek organizations. Professors allowed students to fill out the surveys during regular class times, and athletes and Greek students attended special survey sessions. Two professors offered extra credit, affecting approximately 60 students, while the rest received no incentives for participation. The researchers informed volunteers of the purpose of the study, the nature of the survey questions, and the approximate time involved. Participants were assured of their anonymity, signed an informed consent form, and then completed the surveys.

## Results

Initially, the data were analyzed comparing all Greek men and women to all non-Greek men and women. Because much of the literature supports the idea that Greek men and Greek women differ in their alcohol use, sexual behaviors, and academic integrity, the data were ana-

lyzed comparing Greek men ( $n = 38$ ) to non-Greek men ( $n = 55$ ) and Greek women ( $n = 71$ ) to non-Greek women ( $n = 82$ ). Further, Greek men and Greek women were compared on alcohol abuse, sexual behaviors, and academic integrity.

### Alcohol Abuse

Analysis of variances (ANOVA) indicated significant differences in numerous variables concerning student behavior related to alcohol. Greek students were more likely to have used alcohol in the past month ( $F = 10.6$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and to have had more drinks when using alcohol ( $F = 4.1$ ,  $p < .05$ ). In addition, Greeks were more likely to have participated in risky behaviors, such as driving after drinking, during the last month ( $F = 9.6$ ,  $p < .01$ ) or having unprotected sex after drinking during the last school year ( $F = 5.3$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Greek men and women also tended to experience more negative secondary effects from their alcohol abuse than non-Greeks. These included forgetting their location ( $F = 9.2$ ,  $p < .01$ ), hurting themselves ( $F = 9.9$ ,  $p < .01$ ), and negatively impacting their academics ( $F = 7.8$ ,  $p < .01$ ) during the last school year.

When comparing Greek men with non-Greeks on the alcohol use and sexual behavior variables, independent sample t-tests were used. Greek men were more likely than non-Greek men to have used alcohol in the past month ( $t = 2.86$ ,  $p = .005$ ) and to have had more drinks per sitting ( $t = 2.31$ ,  $p = .023$ ). For negative secondary effects, Greek men were more likely to forget their location when drinking ( $t = 2.03$ ,  $p = .045$ ) than non-Greek men.

For Greek women compared to non-Greek women, Greek women were more likely to have used alcohol in the past month ( $t = 2.44$ ,  $p = .016$ ) and were more likely to have driven after drinking ( $t = 3.00$ ,  $p = .003$ ). For secondary negative effects of drinking, Greek women reported that they were more likely to hurt themselves ( $t = 2.72$ ,  $p = .007$ ), to hurt their academics ( $t = 2.63$ ,  $p = .01$ ), and to forget their location ( $t = 2.65$ ,  $p = .009$ ).

When comparing Greek men with Greek women, Greek men were more likely to have used alcohol in the past 30 days ( $t = 3.66$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and to have driven after drinking ( $t = 3.38$ ,  $p = .001$ ). For sec-

ondary negative effects, Greek men were more likely to have regretted something during the first year of college ( $t = 2.76, p = .007$ ), to have forgotten their location after drinking ( $t = 2.33, p = .021$ ), and to have had unprotected sex after drinking ( $t = 3.08, p = .003$ ).

### Sexual Behaviors

While Greeks were more likely than non-Greeks to have unprotected sex after drinking (statistics noted above), both groups tended to be relatively similar in their overall neglect of safe-sex behaviors within the past 30 days. No significant differences were found on variables related to students' risky sexual behaviors, such as using condoms during oral sex and having anal and vaginal intercourse ( $F = 1.19, p = .278$ ;  $F = .261, p = .610$ ;  $F = 2.81, p = .095$ , respectively). No significant differences were found on the same variables between Greek men and non-Greek men, but one difference was noted when comparing Greek women with non-Greek women. Specifically, Greek women reported that they were less likely to have used a condom during vaginal sex than non-Greek women ( $t = 2.17, p = .032$ ). For Greek men and Greek women, Greek men were more likely to have used a condom during vaginal sex ( $t = 2.60, p = .011$ ).

### Academic Integrity

For the four categories of cheating behaviors—Copying and Cheating on Exams, Plagiarism, Fabrication of Sources, and Obtaining Unpermitted Help—a Mann Whitney U test was used to compare Greeks and non-Greeks. Results indicated that only in the area of Fabrication of Sources for bibliographic materials were Greek students significantly more likely to cheat than non-Greek students ( $z = 2.81, p < .01$ ). For attitudes about cheating, non-Greek students were more likely to agree with the idea that reporting someone for cheating was worse than cheating itself ( $z = -2.23, p < .03$ ).

Comparing Greek women to non-Greek women resulted in similar findings. Greek women were more likely to fabricate sources ( $z = 3.715, p < .001$ ). No significant differences were found between Greek men and non-Greek men. When comparing Greek men and Greek women on the academic integrity variables, there were no significant differences between groups on any of the variables.

## Discussion

Greeks in this study reported using alcohol more often and in greater quantity, and then participating in risky behaviors or experiencing negative consequences from their drinking more often than non-Greek students. These results support the idea that Greek life tends to promote substantial abuse of alcohol and negative behaviors among its undergraduate members, and it is consistent with prior research based on national data sets and on large campuses (Danielson, Taylor, & Hartford, 2001; Tampo, 1990; Wechsler, Kuh, & Davenport, 1996). Further, Greek men used alcohol more often and experienced more negative effects than Greek women.

Both Greeks and non-Greeks tended to engage in similar amounts of risky sexual behaviors. With the exception of Greek students' unprotected sex after drinking, they generally were not significantly different in their sexual behaviors. When comparing Greek and non-Greek women, an important exception was found regarding condom use. Greek women were less likely to use a condom during vaginal intercourse. Furthermore, Greek women were less likely than Greek men to have used a condom during vaginal sex. These mixed findings are somewhat consistent with previous research on unsafe sexual activity (Chng & Moore, 1994) and indicate that Greek affiliation may not be a factor in sexual behaviors.

The only significant difference found between Greeks and non-Greeks regarding academic integrity was in fabricating sources. This finding did not hold true when looking only at Greek men. The current study's findings are difficult to compare with previous studies on academic dishonesty because previous studies identified different constructs of academic integrity. Previous findings at larger universities, which focused on cheating on exams, revealed Greeks reported cheating on exams more often than non-Greeks (McCabe & Bowers, 1996; McCabe & Trevino, 1997). The current study, at a small institution, did not find a significant difference between Greeks and non-Greeks on copying and cheating on exams ( $z = -1.54$ ,  $p = .12$ ), indicating that institutional size or context may play a greater role in academic integrity than does Greek membership. Interestingly, Greek members' attitudes regarding cheating appeared significantly stricter than non-

Greeks. While previous research did not mention this aspect of academic integrity, these results indicate that non-Greeks were more likely than Greeks to consider reporting students for cheating worse than the cheating behavior itself. There were no gender differences within fraternal organizations found related to the academic integrity variables.

The results of this study, within a small, church-affiliated, liberal arts campus, had both consistencies and differences from the findings of previous studies focused on larger campuses or national data sets. Findings regarding substantial alcohol abuse and risky sexual behaviors suggested that Greeks, relative to their non-Greek peers at a small, private college, experienced problems similar to Greek students at larger, public institutions. More problems with some areas of academic integrity existed for Greek students than non-Greeks in this study. These issues may, however, be less severe or differ meaningfully from those at larger public universities.

The current study's measures of academic integrity were analyzed differently than the measures used in previous studies, making it difficult to compare the results with past research findings. While this study focused on one campus in one region of the country, these results do suggest that considering size and type of campus may be an important variable when examining the effects student subcultures, such as the Greek system, have on problematic social behaviors experienced by students.

A number of limitations hinder the general utility of these research results. While this study's focus on a small, private, liberal arts institution was considered strength; the focus on only one college limits the generalizability of findings. Because each institution is unique in nature, other similar colleges may have a distinction among Greek and non-Greek students not found here, or they may have a different set of problems to manage. Additionally, all participants volunteered. There is no way of knowing if substantial differences existed between participants and nonparticipants. However, the sample size was satisfactory, with 46% of the total Greek population included in the results. Due to existence of only historically White Greek organizations on campus, findings should not be generalized to historically Black or Hispanic Greek organizations.

This study indicates that future research endeavors into Greek life and other issues on college campuses may need to consider potential differences between the results seen on a large, public campus and those evidenced in a small, liberal arts setting. The institution's campus culture may influence student subcultures and any effect individual departments and programs exert on those subcultures. In addition to comparisons between large public and small private campuses, studies that encompass the many diverse types of institutions that comprise American higher education could prove helpful. Additional study of undergraduate Greek members, including the effects of gender and race, could also yield important knowledge for those who work with these groups of students.

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