

student **POLL**

MARKET INTELLIGENCE FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

PUBLISHER'S NOTE

Fraternities and sororities not a factor in college choice.

Amid continuing and often contentious discussion of the role of fraternities and sororities and their impact on the social fabric of colleges and universities, we thought it would be useful to explore the attitudes of high school seniors about Greek organizations and their importance in the choice of a college. Our study preceded the controversial February 1999 decision by Dartmouth President James Wright to make that institution's Greek organizations "substantially co-educational" in an effort to reflect the college's commitment to inclusiveness.

Our findings suggest beyond any doubt that college and university officials can be confident that their dealings with fraternities and sororities will not have an unfavorable impact on recruitment. The presence of fraternities or sororities is not a factor in college choice. Few students intend to participate in Greek life and fewer still intend

to live in Greek housing. Parents, on balance, disapprove of Greek membership. Participation in Greek life is not perceived to be an important part of a student's educational experience. It is worth noting that students from the South indicate a significantly stronger interest in Greek organizations than do their counterparts elsewhere. However, this interest does not actively influence their choice of school.

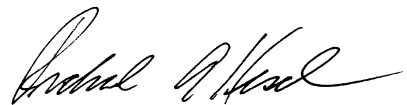
In our other work — including several consulting studies focused on alumni attitudes about fraternities and sororities — we have found many of the same patterns. This evidence suggests that stronger regulation of fraternities and sororities, or perhaps even their elimination, will impact student recruitment, fundraising, and other advancement efforts far less than has been imagined. While opposition to such initiatives might be

ADVISORY

Develop and enforce policies that will reduce the influences of pledging, rush, and other rituals associated with Greek membership that reinforce social exclusivity and the creation of social castes and cliques.

highly vocal, our experience suggests that it represents only a small number of voices.

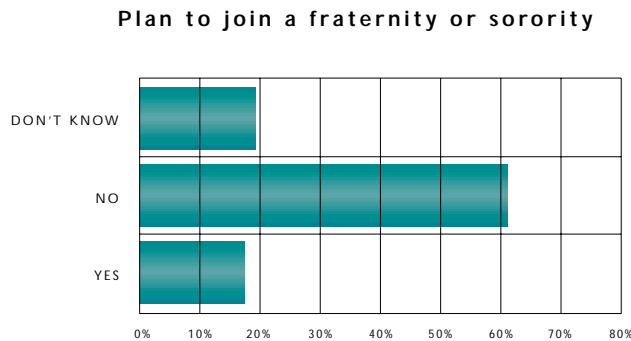
On the basis of our evidence, the lesson for presidents, board members, and other decision makers facing tough decisions about Greek life is clear: Make your decisions with an eye on principle, not on student recruitment.



Richard A. Hesel
Publisher

1 Only a small percentage of high school seniors intend to participate in Greek life in college.

TABLE 1



We began by asking respondents about their intentions to join a fraternity or sorority in college. Nearly two-thirds of students (62 percent) reported no desire to become a member or a fraternity or sorority. (Table 1) Only 18 percent of respondents indicated they did plan to join, while the remaining 20 percent were undecided about their intentions. Students from the South were significantly more likely (40 percent) to indicate that they wanted to join a fraternity or sorority than were those from other parts of the country (15 percent). Students who said that they intended to work during freshman year were significantly less likely (18 percent) to indicate they planned to join one of these organizations than were those who did not plan to work (31 percent).

2 A sizable proportion of students who wish to join a fraternity or sorority are confident about gaining membership.

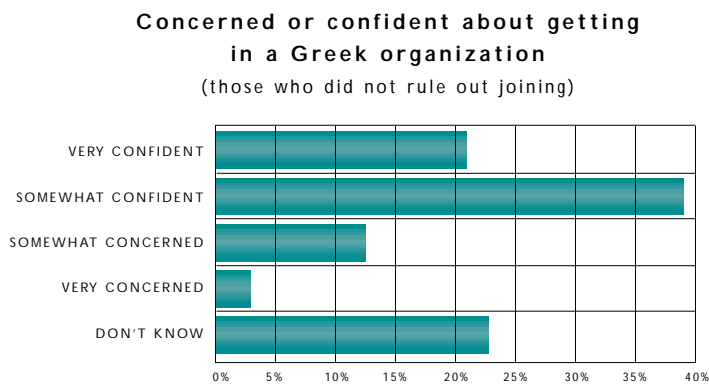
We then asked those respondents who had indicated a desire to participate in Greek life, as well as those who were undecided about joining, to rate their level of confidence about getting into a fraternity or sorority.

Despite the apparent rigors of the pledging and initiation process and the requirements many Greek organizations set for membership, a majority of respondents (61 percent) inclined to join one of these organizations feel

either very or somewhat confident that they will be accepted by a fraternity or sorority that they prefer.

Of that total, more than one-fifth (21 percent) of students indicated they were very confident and two-fifths (40 percent) said that they were somewhat confident about getting into a preferred fraternity or sorority. Thirteen percent of respondents expressed some concern, and another three percent were very concerned about their ability to get into a fraternity or sorority. Nearly one-quarter of students (23 percent) indicated that they were uncertain about their likelihood to gain entrance to a Greek organization. (Table 2)

TABLE 2



Among those who expressly indicated that they planned to join a fraternity or sorority, the levels of confidence regarding acceptance by a Greek organization are even higher. Over three-quarters (77 percent) of those who said that they were interested in joining a sorority or fraternity indicated that they were either very confident or somewhat confident that they would be able to get in. Just 16 percent were either very or somewhat concerned that they would not be able to gain entrance to a fraternity or sorority that they prefer.

3 A majority of students do not perceive membership in a fraternity or sorority to be an important part of their educational experience.

Among respondents who had previously said that they were interested or undecided about joining one of these organizations, some 68 percent expressed ambivalence as to the importance of joining, saying they could “take or leave” joining. A quarter (25 percent) of the students indicated that joining a Greek organization was important although not critical. (Table 3A)

Students from the South (45 percent) and students from the West (40 percent) were more likely to think joining a

Greek organization was important but not critical than were those from other parts of the country. (Table 3B) Only a small minority of students indicated very strong feelings either for or against fraternities and sororities: only three percent said that they viewed joining one of these groups as critical to their college experience and just one percent of respondents postulated a negative effect of joining. The remaining three percent were unclear about the importance of joining a fraternity or sorority.

When we look only at those students who indicated that they did want to join a fraternity or sorority the numbers remain relatively consistent, with five percent judging it as critical to their college experience and over a third (37 percent) judging it to be important but not critical. Even among this group over half (56 percent) said they could take it or leave it and one percent indicated that they thought it would have a negative effect on their college experience.

Next those individuals who did not rule out joining a fraternity or sorority were asked a series of paired comparisons about which aspects of Greek life appealed most to them. The most preferred aspect was making true life long friends, followed closely by establishing connections for future career opportunities and being socially accepted. Participating in community service activities and having an academic support system came next. Stereotypical expectations about fraternities and sororities, getting out of college housing (dorms or residence halls), and having parties round out the bottom of this list, perhaps because of the more negative societal values placed on these types of preferences.

TABLE 3 A

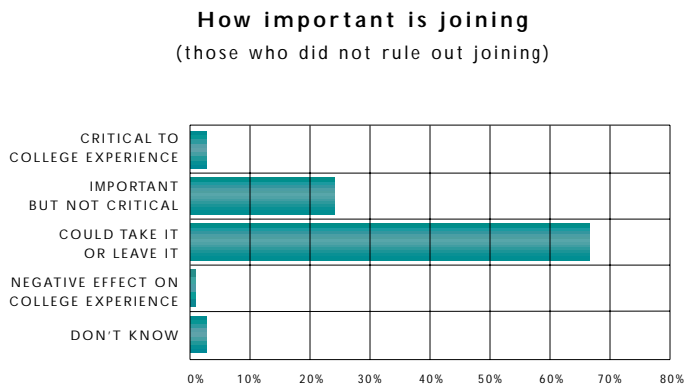
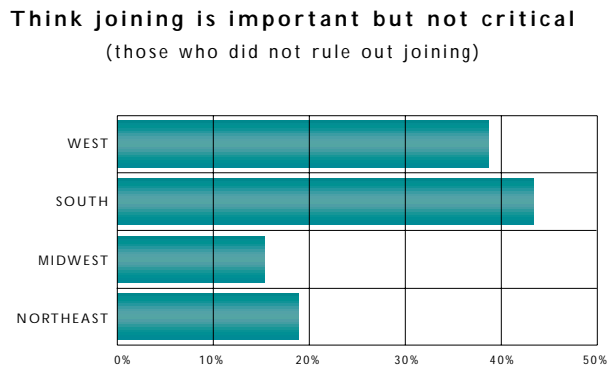


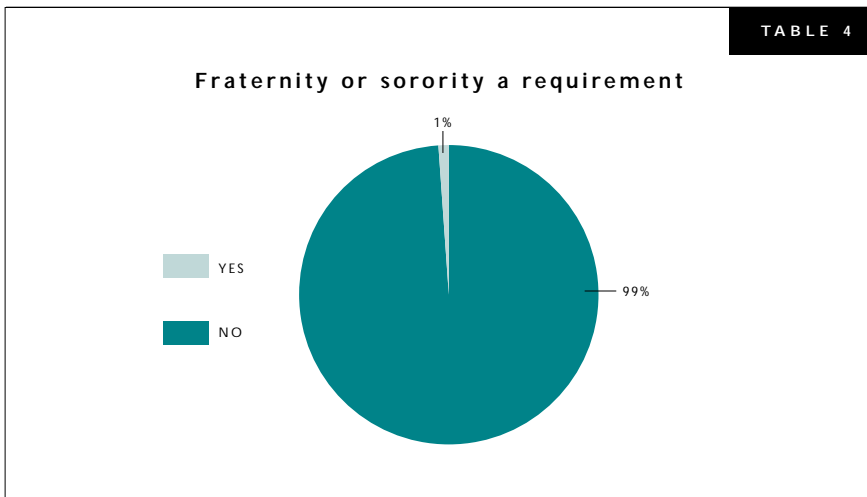
TABLE 3 B



ADVISORY

Do not give excessive attention to fraternities and sororities or Greek life in admissions publications, your web site, campus tours, or other recruitment communications. There is more to be lost than gained by doing so.

4 Universally, students do not select a college or university based on the presence or absence of fraternities or sororities at the institution.



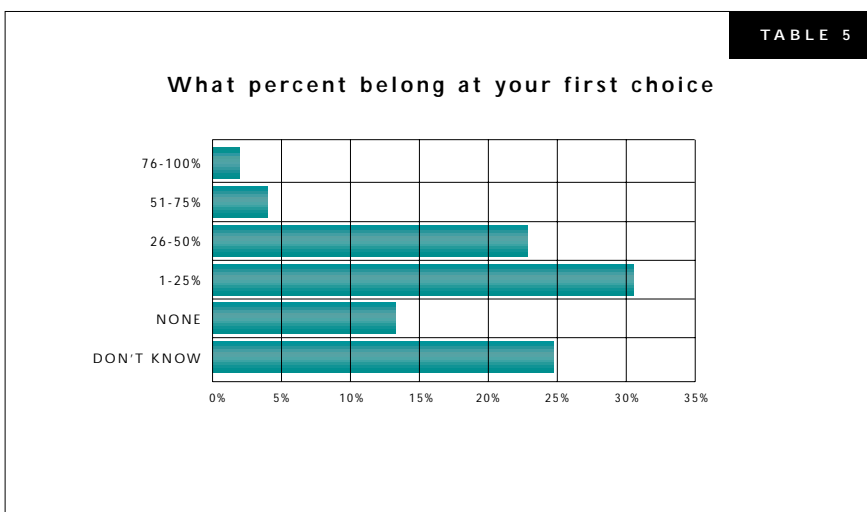
We asked respondents if the presence of fraternities and sororities on a campus was a factor in their college choices. Ninety-nine percent of respondents who did not rule out joining a Greek organization reported that having Greek organizations was not a requirement when choosing the schools to which they would apply. Just one percent indicated that the availability of Greek life was a requirement in decisions about where to apply and enroll. (Table 4)

Those who had previously indicated that they were not interested in joining a fraternity or sorority were asked whether not having these organizations was a requirement when deciding to which schools they would apply. Only four percent indicated that this was the case while 94 percent indicated that their absence was not a requirement.

5 Students generally overestimate the level of participation in fraternities and sororities.

We were also curious about how the respondents estimated Greek participation rates at their first choice colleges. When asked to guess what percentage of students belonged to Greek organizations at these schools, one quarter (25 percent) of those polled indicated that they did not know. The largest

group of respondents (31 percent) indicated that they thought that between one and 25 percent of the students at their first choice college or university will belong to a fraternity or sorority. Twenty three percent believe that between one-fourth and one half of all students on campus will be members of



fraternities and sororities. An additional four percent of those who responded to this question believed that more than one half of all students at their institution join Greek organizations. These results far exceed the actual percentage of students who participate in Greek life. Nationally, only about 10 percent of college students become sorority or fraternity members, according to the National Interfraternity Conference. When the responses that these students gave are averaged you find that students expect 25 percent of their peers at their first choice institutions will be members of Greek organizations.

Students in the South tend to see more (36 percent) of their future peers as belonging to a fraternity or sorority than do residents of other parts of the country. Prospective male students also see more of their future peers belonging to fraternities (29 percent) than do females (21 percent). Not surprisingly, those who indicated that they intended to join a Greek organization or at least did not rule out this affiliation thought that higher numbers of students (32 percent) pledged than did those who did not intend to join a fraternity or sorority (20 percent).

6 Students make the decision to join a fraternity or sorority largely on their own, with few parents offering encouragement.

We also were interested in students' assessment of their parents' attitudes about fraternities and sororities. Parents do not appear to play a major role in the decision; however, among those who reported any parental influence, more students reported that their parents discouraged their membership. A majority of students (68 percent) reported that the decision to participate

in Greek life was entirely their own. Twenty-one percent of respondents reported that parents would either strongly discourage or somewhat discourage their decision to join a fraternity or sorority. Only seven percent of students anticipated any type of positive encouragement from their parents about joining. Another four percent of respondents were unsure how their parents would respond. (Table 6A)

There are some interesting subgroup differences in the perceived parental support for fraternity or sorority membership. White students (70 percent) were more likely than black students (54 percent) to indicate that their parents would leave membership entirely up to them, while black students were more likely to indicate that their parents would discourage membership (33 percent) than were white students (19 percent). (Table 6B) As one might expect, those who indicated that they would join a fraternity or were uncertain about joining indicated higher levels of parental encouragement (14 percent) than did those who did not intend to join a Greek organization (two percent). The converse is also true, with 27 percent of those who were not intending to join a Greek organization indicating that their parents would disapprove of joining a fraternity or sorority compared to just 11 percent of those who intended to join one of these organizations.

Rounding of numbers resulted in a total slightly greater than 100% in table 6B.

TABLE 6A

How do you think your parents would feel about you joining

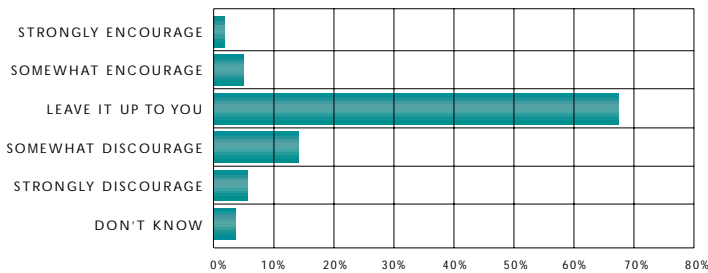
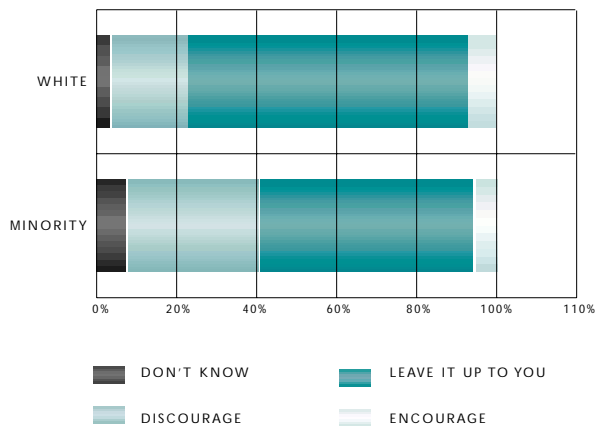


TABLE 6B

How would your parents feel about you joining



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If your campus has a dominant fraternity and sorority system, encourage the creation of strong social alternatives that will appeal to the majority of students who have no interest in Greek life and reduce the influence of the Greek social system on campus social values.

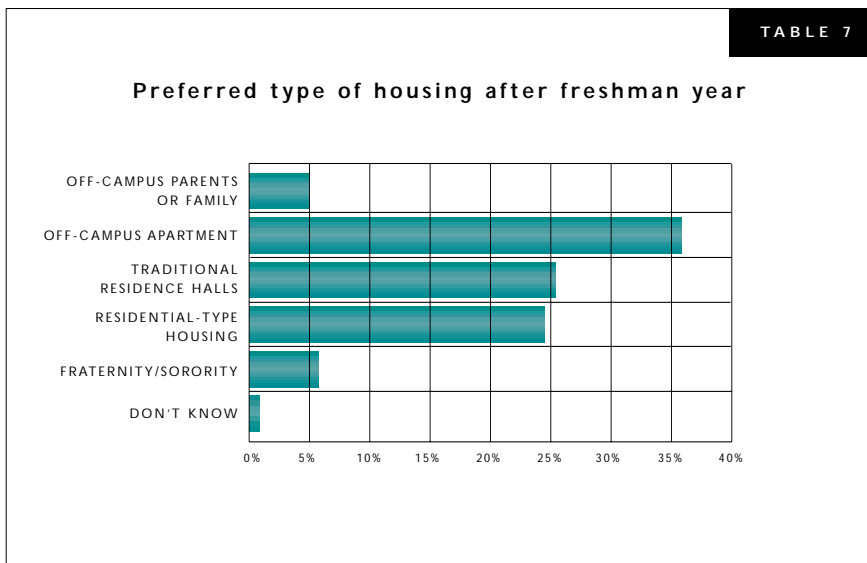
7 Greek housing has little appeal: most students prefer living in housing owned and managed by their college or university even after their freshman year.

We asked students which type of housing they would prefer after their freshman year of college. Only a small proportion (six percent) of students reported that they wanted to live in fraternity or sorority housing. More

than 50 percent of respondents indicated a preference for college housing (25 percent said they would prefer residential-type housing owned by the college and 26 percent would prefer traditional college dorms or residence

halls). Another 37 percent of students reported a desire to live in an off-campus apartment either alone, or with friends and other students. Just five percent of students reported that they would be living with their families. (Table 7)

There are some interesting subgroup differences regarding where students plan to live after their freshman year. Fifteen percent of those who did not exclude joining a Greek organization indicated that they preferred to live in a house owned and managed by their fraternity or sorority. Those who did not rule out joining a Greek organization were more likely (44 percent) to want to live in an off-campus apartment than were others (32 percent). Students who ruled out joining a fraternity or sorority were more likely (35 percent) to say they would prefer to live in a traditional dormitory or residence hall than were other students (13 percent). Students who planned on working also were more likely to prefer a traditional dormitory or residence hall (38 percent) than were those who did not intend to work (24 percent). Students from the Northeast (27 percent) were less likely than those from other regions to prefer apartment living.



A D V I S O R Y

Focus your marketing efforts on the overall quality of student life on your campus. Highlight organizations and activities that enhance social life, other than fraternities and sororities.

*student*POLL is an authoritative national survey that measures the opinions, perceptions, and behavior of high-ability, college-bound high school students and their parents. Available only by subscription, it is published quarterly by Art & Science Group, Inc., leading institutional marketing consultants to higher education and the non-profit sector. Information about Art & Science Group and how to order subscriptions to *student*POLL can be found on the back cover of this report.

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SURVEY
METHODOLOGY

The findings reported in this issue of *student*POLL are based on in-depth telephone interviews with a random national sample of 500 high school seniors who plan to enroll in four-year colleges in the fall of 1998. To qualify for an interview, respondents must have achieved a combined, SATI score of 1,050 or higher. The study sample was drawn and weighted to represent the national distribution of students with qualifying SAT scores by geography, gender, intended major, and income. Questions about survey methods, findings, and other matters should be addressed to Art & Science Group, Inc.

H O T T O P I C

The desire for greater independence and freedom are primary factors motivating students to live off campus.

We asked respondents how long they planned to live in campus housing. The majority of students (59 percent) reported they would not live in residential housing throughout their college careers. A substantial number (42 percent) indicated that they only planned to live on campus for one (16 percent) or two (26 percent) years. Students from the West were less likely (19 percent) to plan to spend their entire college career on campus than were residents of other parts of the country. Those with SAT scores in excess of 1300 were more likely to intend to spend four years in campus housing (40 percent) than were those with lower SAT scores (28 percent).

Those who attended public high schools were less likely (35 percent) to plan to spend all of their time in campus housing than were those who attended private high schools (51 percent).

We thought it would be helpful to learn why some students were interested in off-campus living arrangements. More than one-fifth of students (21 percent) cited that college housing does not offer as much freedom as other housing options. Twelve percent noted improved amenities offered by off-campus apartments when compared to residential housing. Eight percent cited size concerns while six percent noted that the college expects upperclassmen to live off

campus. Other common reasons for living off-campus included: lack of privacy (six percent), too expensive (five percent), prefer to live at home (five percent), better options that are just as close (three percent) and living on campus is not as much fun (two percent). A large number of students (30 percent) gave idiosyncratic reasons for selecting an off-campus housing alternative. A sample of their comments follows:

"I want to be with friends."

"I want to do a study abroad program."

"I don't like dorms."

"My brothers didn't live on campus."

"I want to have my own pets."

"I just want a change of scenery."

A D V I S O R Y

Develop a program to ensure your institution's on-campus housing provides the level of comfort and amenities students associate with off-campus alternatives. Since they are a choice of last resort, weave your campus physical planning and housing policies of any dependence on fraternity and sorority housing.

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