

THE CHRONICLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION



Letters

Correspondence from Chronicle readers.

The Post-Pandemic College Experience Needs Greek Life

FEBRUARY 15, 2024

To the Editor:

Your recent article, “[Why Campus Life Fell Apart](#)” (*The Chronicle*, January 26), examines post-pandemic student engagement as a key to both retention and graduation. Their piece failed to note one of the greatest programs which retains college students generally but especially after Covid-19: fraternity and sorority life.

In Summer 2020, Ronald Yates, a math professor at the College of Southern Nevada, published a [study](#) that reviewed literature from 1970s to the modern era. He examined the work of long-time higher education experts like the late Dr. Alexander Astin, Dr. George D. Kuh, Dr. Vincent Tinto, Drs. Donald G. and Elizabeth Creamer, Dr. Gary Pike, Dr. Ernest

Pascarella and Dr. Patrick T. Terenzini, who all demonstrated that students who are engaged both inside and outside the classroom are more likely to stay in school and ultimately graduate.

As Pike and Dr. Jerry Askew explained, “fraternities and sororities contribute to the psychological sense of community that is experienced by students and increases levels of social involvement.” In the late 2010s, Yates affirmed these outcomes in his study revealing that “the addition of a fraternity and sorority community on a college or university campus correlated to a positive impact on graduation rates.... in alignment with Astin’s Theory of Student Involvement and Tinto’s Theory of Student Departure.”

This led Yates to conclude that “the addition of a fraternity and sorority community can have a positive overall influence on student and institutional success.”

During the pandemic, colleges and universities worked tirelessly to maintain effective instruction while managing new policies that governed life on campus, from enacting new procedures on student health to enforcing new rules for extracurricular activities. As these significant changes inevitably disrupted ordinary campus life, national fraternities and sororities endeavored to ground their classmates with meaningful social connections that provided stability and support to combat such pervasive unpredictability and isolation.

The research proves their efforts paid off. Eighty nine percent of fraternity and sorority professional staff and volunteers “believe their relationships with undergraduate chapters remained consistent or grew stronger during the pandemic,” a [study](#) from the Arizona State and Valdosta State Universities found. Furthermore, most national fraternities report overall positive gains in membership post-pandemic. In fact, according to the North American Interfraternity Conference, an umbrella group for men’s social fraternities, fraternity membership is presently, on average, greater than pre-pandemic membership levels, some by as much as 10 percent higher, despite university enrollment not yet recovering from its pandemic nadir.

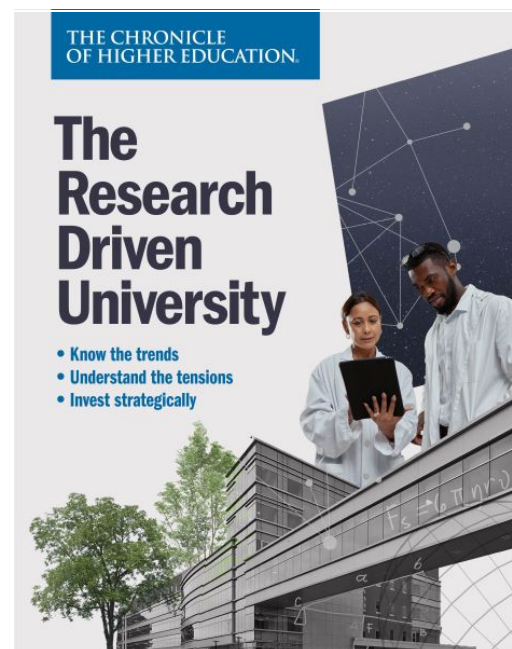
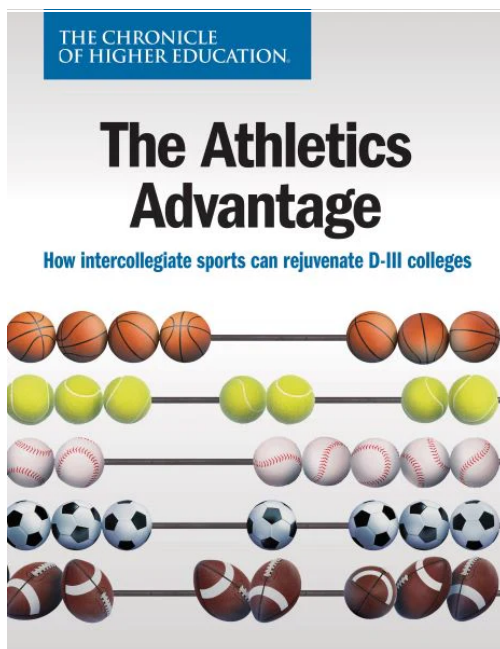
As a former dean of students and vice president for student affairs, I am well-versed in the benefits to and challenges with fraternities and sororities. But I know without a doubt that there is real value in supporting a healthy, vibrant Greek life. Such a community, collaborating with national fraternal organizations, can keep students fully engaged while also tackling the real issues that plague campus life, from substance abuse to sexual misconduct.

The decline in student enrollment and engagement is very real. So, too, is the fact that a strong fraternal community retains and graduates students — before the pandemic, during the pandemic, and, now, post-pandemic. The numbers tell the true story.

Dawn Watkins Wiese
Chief Operating Officer

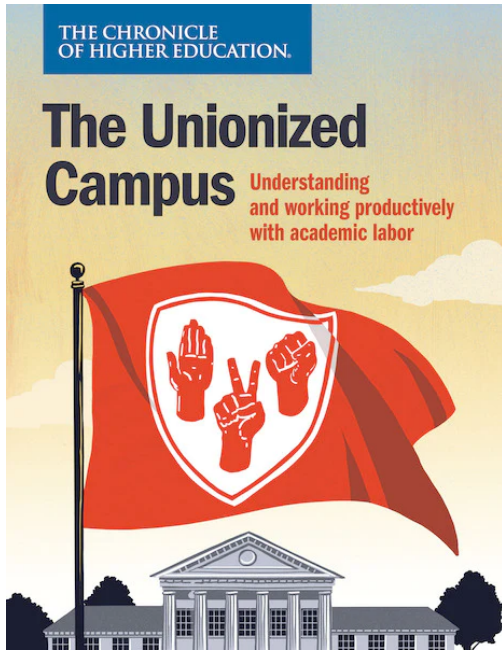
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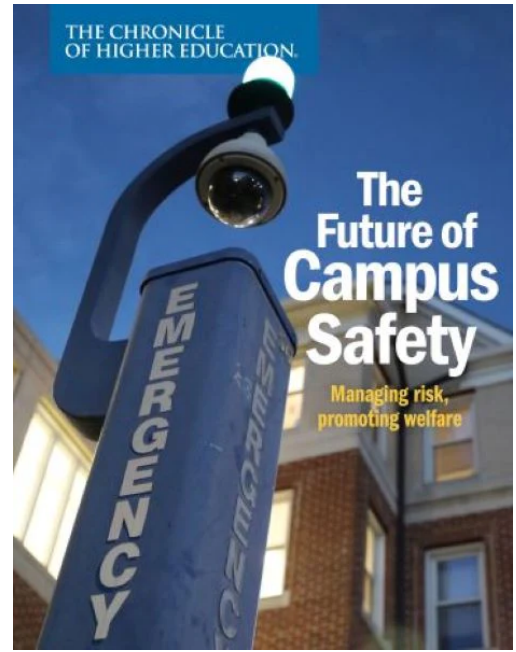


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