# Effects of Fraternity Life on First-Year Students

**AYURG | Social Sciences, Journalism (SSJ) | Tags: Survey; Qualitative Data Analysis**

This cover page is meant to focus your reading of the sample proposal, summarizing important aspects of proposal writing that the author did well or could have improved. **Review the following sections before reading the sample.** The proposal is also annotated throughout to highlight key elements of the proposal’s structure and content.

### Proposal Strengths vs. Areas for Improvement

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proposal Strengths</th>
<th>Areas for Improvement</th>
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<td>The researcher justifies the topic, the method, and the location/place of the study proposed by reviewing what is known about each component and identifying gaps in knowledge within the background section.</td>
<td>While a budget is included in the appendix as is required for any AYURG, there is no mention in the proposal itself why the money is needed. This problem would be remedied by adding a few words about participant compensation when discussing the survey methods.</td>
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<td>The researcher describes how the data collected will be analyzed in detail, and shows how the output of that analysis will help to answer their research question.</td>
<td>This project handles material that the researcher has a personal connection to, but it is not addressed how that may impact the research aside from providing access to a population.</td>
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<td>While some aims are present, rephrasing to create or including an explicit research question would aid in comprehension and strengthen the proposal. If in the first paragraph, the question could be broader with the following background section serving as a funnel that adds more specificity.</td>
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### Other Key Features to Take Note Of

- **AYURG proposals require IRB submission at time of application;** you will need to enter the IRB number during the application process. Please see the Human Subjects Research section of our website for additional details.
- **All Academic Year URGs require a budget.** There is no required format; however, we do provide a template on our website. The scope of the proposal should focus on what the funding covers.
- **Any survey or interview methods should have the surveys and interview questions attached as an appendix as this proposal does.**
Greek Life has faced increased scrutiny over the past several years, both nation-wide, and here at Northwestern. Most recently, date-rape accusations brought against Northwestern’s Sigma Alpha Epsilon chapter shook our campus to its core and caused many students to question whether the Greek system still has a place in modern society (McCoppin & Briscoe, 2017). It is possible that such horrific incidents are linked to Greek Life due to the kind of people it attracts, the culture bred by the institutional structure, the socialization that occurs upon joining, or a combination of all three of these factors and more. Despite (or because of) all the negative press, many Greek systems, including Northwestern’s, mandate certain programming designed to encourage healthy community behavior. In the proposed study, I would seek to directly assess how Northwestern 1st-year fraternity students’ attitudes in respect to social orientation, seeking mental health help, and intervening in sexual violence change throughout the pledge process, and whether such change is mediated by organizational identification. Altogether, this research would contribute to the larger discussion as to the effects of joining fraternities, as well as test how effective at fostering community wellbeing the interventions currently required by Northwestern University’s Interfraternity Council (IFC) are. As an undergraduate who has both been active in psychology research as well as the incoming IFC Vice President for Membership Development, I believe I am uniquely driven and qualified to undertake this project.

Despite constant controversy, some scholars believe that the effects of fraternity life are actually underrepresented in academic research, and the research which does exist is too narrow in focus (Broughton & Molasso 2006). That being said, there are previous studies that have sought to examine the different psycho-social outcomes among students who choose to go Greek. Surprisingly, past research has shown that first-year Greek students do not differ from their non-Greek counterparts across the domains of reasoning & problem solving, moral reasoning, inclination to inquire, intercultural effectiveness, and psychological well-being (Martin, Asel, Pascarella 2011). One domain this study will seek to examine which, to the researchers’ best knowledge, has not been previously studied in a fraternal setting, is Social Value Orientation (SVO). This construct measures prosocial attitude, reflected by the demonstrated allocation of resources between a decision-maker and an anonymous stranger. SVO can influence propensity to cooperate, as well as engage in other prosocial behaviors (Murphy, Ackermann, Handgraaf 2011).

In an effort to prevent sexual assault on college campuses, certain interventions have been created and administered to student groups. The idea that harm against women exists on a spectrum, with the highest level being rape, and the lowest level being slurs against women or other misogynist attitudes has been used in educating men about how they can put an end to sexual violence (Kelly 1988). Previous research has shown that designed interventions can be effective, but call for more research as to continually evaluate these programs in order to drive improvement (Langhinrichsen-Rohling 2011). In the domain of mental health, previous research has shown that certain factors such as social support or self-stigma can impact propensity to seek professional help (Nam, Choi, Lee, Lee, Kim, Lee 2013). However, little research exists as to the effectiveness of interventions designed to destigmatize mental health, and to the best of the researchers’ knowledge, no such research has been conducted in fraternity settings.

In an effort to foster community wellbeing, Northwestern’s IFC currently mandates several interventions seeking, among other things, to destigmatize mental health and encourage bystander intervention along the spectrum of sexual violence. Recent research has shown that such bystander sexual violence prevention interventions can be effective at changing attitudes in the desired direction, though less so for men already high at risk of engaging in sexually coercive behavior (Elias-Lambert, Black 2016). Greek systems vary tremendously across the country, so results from
other studies may not generalize to Northwestern – likewise, the results obtained through this research may not generalize to all fraternities across the country, but it will provide an interesting case study of our own campus environment. The results of this research would shine light as to whether these interventions are succeeding in making fraternity men at Northwestern more prone to intervene in the face of sexual violence, as well as seek help for mental health issues if needed.

In order to examine my research questions, I will seek to survey 80 undergraduates total (40 of whom are first-year fraternity members, 40 of whom are unaffiliated freshmen men) at two separate intervals, once in winter quarter prior to the start of the IFC mandated interventions, and once in spring quarter following their cessation. Given my position on the IFC executive board, I will be able to directly recruit fraternity men through individual fraternity educators, and the unaffiliated sample will be recruited through posters across campus and posts in the class of 2021 Facebook group. The survey, which should take no more than eight minutes, will be administered online via Qualtrics, and will measure 3 domains for the unaffiliated sample, and 4 for those pledging fraternities. I will seek to measure social value orientation (Murphy et al. 2011), propensity to seek professional help (Fischer & Farina 1995), willingness to intervene as a bystander along the spectrum of harm to women (McMahon, Postmus, Koenick 2011), and for fraternity men, strength of organizational identification (Mael & Ashforth 1992), all using previously validated scales that have been used in other relevant studies.

After collecting responses from both survey waves, data will be analyzed using several types of statistical techniques, including zero-order correlations, linear regressions, ANOVAs, ANCOVAs, and structural equation models. Specifically, I will examine how membership identification with that fraternity predicts social value orientation, propensity to seek professional help, and willingness to intervene as a bystander along the spectrum of harm to women. In addition, I will compare the mean differences on each of these measures between fraternity members and non-fraternity members. Altogether, these analyses will answer my two research questions: for fraternity members, how does identification with the fraternity predict positive attitude change and how effective are the IFC-mandated interventions at fostering community wellness.

I believe I am qualified to conduct this project, given my previous coursework and lab experience. I am currently volunteering in Dr. Mesmin Destin’s lab for the second quarter in a row, as such I have been exposed to both the inner workings of the lab itself as well as multiple stages of similar research designs. I previously earned Psych 399 credit designing a project alongside Dr. Ginger Pennington where I proposed an idea for novel research in the realm of consumer psychology, helped develop research prompts, and assisted Dr. Pennington in preparing an IRB proposal. I have a 4.0 psychology GPA, encompassing relevant classes such as Psychology 201: Statistical Methods in Psychology, Psychology 205: Research Methods, and Psychology 204: Social Psychology. I am working on this project to earn a Psych 397-1 credit with Dr. Destin. I hope that successfully completing this research will prepare me to conduct another project this summer, as well as prepare me for my ultimate goal of completing a Ph.D. in industrial/organizational psychology. Furthermore, as VP of Membership Development on the IFC executive board, not only does this research have the potential to contribute to the academic conversation surrounding Greek Life, I can assure that its results will be directly considered in formulating the IFC education curriculum for generations of future freshmen.