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## **Student engagement : an application of the theory of planned behavior**

Max A. Seisser V

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## ABSTRACT

### STUDENT ENGAGEMENT: AN APPLICATION OF THE THEORY OF PLANNED BEHAVIOR

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The theory of planned behavior was used to investigate recruitment messages for student engagement opportunities. Participants ( $N = 194$ ) completed a survey of their attitudes, subjective norms, perceived behavioral control, and behavioral intentions to become more engaged in the campus community. Additionally, participants were asked to create a recruitment message for a fraternity or sorority, intramural athletic, or employment opportunity. The results of the study indicated support for the theory in the context of student engagement; both attitudes and subject norms predicted behavioral intentions. In addition, the coding of the recruiting messages indicated that different types of messages were crafted for different student engagement opportunities. Messages designed to recruit for Greek organizations and intramural athletics often contained attitudinal features. Messages designed to recruit for campus employment opportunities often contained reference to perceived behavior control. The implications related to the use of the theory in the context of student engagement are discussed.

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STUDENT ENGAGEMENT: AN APPLICATION OF  
THE THEORY OF PLANNED BEHAVIOR

BY

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

As students begin their time at a college or university, they may try to find a way to fit in to their new community. For some students, this transition can be a challenge. The transition to a college or university may result in alienation. Alienation occurs when a student does not feel like a part of his or her community (Liu, 2010). Alienation can result in negative perceptions of the college or university and is negatively associated with retention (Liu, 2010).

Colleges and universities attract diverse students who have many reasons to become to engaged at their institutions. One key demographic of students, traditional first-year students, are an important retention concern for many universities. According to a US News and World Report (2016), nearly one of every three first-year students will not return for their sophomore year. In order for an institution to stay financially sound, institutions need to retain and graduate their students. Thus, preventing a student from feeling alienated from his or her institutional community is important. However, alienation can be resolved in a student community through student engagement (Liu, 2010). Student engagement provides an outlet for students to meet new people, create a connection with their institution, improve their grade point average, and learn leadership skills necessary for future employment (Kuh, 2003; Kuh, 2005; Liu, 2010; Meyers, Davis, Schreuder, & Seibold, 2016; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Given the importance of

student engagement in the experience of students and to their institutions, investigating student engagement is the focus of this thesis.

At a college or university, there are many opportunities for a student to become engaged on campus through different organizations. Some of these opportunities include student government, marching band, service organizations, religious groups, campus broadcasting, and many more. Because there are so many engagement opportunities at an institution, this thesis will primarily focus on a student's attitude towards fraternities and sororities, participation in intramurals, and employment. These three engagement opportunities were chosen as they encompass a diverse set of engagement opportunities at an institution. Furthermore, these engagement opportunities link to the components of the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1991).

In this study, student engagement will be analyzed through the framework of the theory of planned behavior (TPB; Ajzen, 1985). Further, this study will investigate how persuasive messages could affect a student's decision to join an organization on campus.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

In order to investigate messages that encourage student engagement, this study first needs to explicate engagement and related terms. Engagement has been defined in several ways in the academic literature. For example, Astin (1993) investigated how involvement at a college or university was positively related to how a student can improve throughout their time at an institution. Specifically, Astin (1993) found that involvement in a fraternity or sorority, volunteering, working a part-time job, and a better relationship with faculty members had a positive effect on a student's experience at an institution.

Additionally, Astin (1993) analyzed how personal and environmental factors at a college or university can affect a student's involvement. The foundation of research on engagement emerged from scholarship on involvement, however, involvement was a narrower term than student engagement has become. Previously, involvement encompassed how a student can be involved in the classroom and extra-curricular activities at an institution. However, over time, the literature about student involvement separated the in-class and out of class factors that affect a student's engagement. Thus, some scholars focused on aspects that affect a student's participation in their courses, whereas, other scholars investigated the effects of participation in out of class opportunities. As a result, one component of research about student engagement investigates how a student may feel alienated in his or her campus community.

Case (2007) contrasted what it meant for a student to be engaged in an institution with alienation. In particular, Case (2007) analyzed how alienation affected students who were seeking friendships with other students and who desire these types of interactions. In related research, Krause (2005) analyzed how apathy affects students in their institution and the reasons why students engage or do not engage with their community.

In addition to scholarship on engagement outside of the classroom, some scholars have investigated different factors that affect a student's engagement inside the classroom (Krause & Coates, 2008; Kuh, 2009). For example, three types of engagement that affect the classroom are categorized as behavioral, emotional, and cognitive (Finn & Zimmer, 2012; Fredericks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004). Behavioral engagement in the classroom relates to attendance, how a student participates in class, and if he or she will follow classroom directions and classroom expectations (Finn & Zimmer, 2012). Emotional engagement in the classroom investigates whether or not a student values their academics, and if he or she will persist to continue their education based upon their feelings of acceptance (Finn & Zimmer, 2012). Cognitive engagement in the classroom relates to a student's enjoyment of the subject being taught, and engage in tasks that are beyond the minimal requirements (Finn & Zimmer, 2012). Instead of the class behaviors, this study will investigate engagement in extra-curricular activities because this form relates to alienation and retention.

In this study, student engagement is defined as the process of students actively becoming members of their community through opportunities such as extra-curricular activities and employment (Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, & Hayek 2007). The next sections review types of

student engagement opportunities that were selected for this study which are: fraternity and sorority life, athletics, and student employment.

### Fraternity and Sorority Life

One option for student engagement is a student's participation in a fraternity or sorority. When reviewing the literature about fraternity and sorority life, there has been a debate as to whether or not this type of engagement has a positive (e.g., Astin, 1993; Binder, 2003; Gregory, 2003) or negative (e.g., Cashin, Presley, & Meilman, 1998; Blimling, 1993; Kuh, Pascarella, & Wechsler, 1996) influence on students.

According to the North-American Interfraternity Conference (2016) and National Panhellenic Council (2016), fraternities and sororities offer many benefits to students who join an organization. For example, students who feel alienated at a college or university may choose to become a member of a fraternity or sorority to alleviate their feelings of alienation. By joining Greek organizations, a student has an opportunity to gain "brothers" or "sisters" and build relationships with other students. Also, fraternity and sorority membership is likely to allow students to have relationships with people who have a variety of backgrounds. By doing so, a student has the opportunity to develop more as they learn from others and engage in relationships with others they may not have had the opportunity to meet.

Another benefit for students who join fraternities and sororities is the engagement they have with their university community. Meyers et al. (2016) reported that students who were in Greek organizations were more attached to their institution. Furthermore, by having a sense of organizational identification, a student can gain a sense of identity through their membership

(Mael & Ashforth, 1992). This type of identification is important for a student because it allows them to define who they are and feel a sense of belonging (Ashforth, Harrison, & Corley, 2008).

Another opportunity available to fraternity and sorority life members is civic engagement (North-American Interfraternity Conference, 2016). Typically, a fraternity or sorority will have a national philanthropy. Chapter members volunteer their time and raise money to donate to these charitable causes. In the 2013 academic school year, fraternities alone donated over \$20 million dollars to philanthropic organizations (North-American Interfraternity Conference, 2016).

Although proponents list many benefits to joining a fraternity or sorority, there are costs and detractors too. One factor that discourages membership for students are the fees associated with the organization (“National Fees,” 2016). In order for an organization to stay financially sound, fees are a necessary part of a student’s membership. Organizational fees pay for programming, recruitment events, attending conferences sponsored by an organization’s national headquarters, and liability for risk management (“National Fees,” 2016). Because of these fees, the cost associated with organizations may deter potential new members.

Binge drinking may also be a cost of fraternity or sorority membership. The extant literature on binge drinking indicates that members of fraternities and sororities are more likely to binge drink (e.g., Wechsler, Dowdall, Davenport, & Castillo, 1995; Cashin, Presley, & Meilman, 1998; Grenier, Gorskey, & Folse, 1998). Binge drinking affects a student’s class attendance, time spent studying, and grade point average (e.g., Wechsler, Maenner, Gledhill-Hoyt, & Hang, 1998; Wolaver, 2002; Porter & Pryer, 2007; Pascarella, Goodman, Seifert, Tagliapietra-Nicoli, Park, & Whitt, 2007). Binge drinking and the associated academic effects are likely to make some students question joining a Greek organization.

Greek organizations have also been characterized as a context for violence related to intoxication. Sexual violence was found to occur between members of fraternities who had consumed alcohol and did not receive consent (Fourbert, Garner, and Thaxter, 2006). In addition to alcohol consumption, masculinity norms have been found to be indicators of sexual violence among fraternity members (Locke & Mahalik, 2005). These norms express a man's beliefs about dominance, aggression, and views about homosexuality. If men believed these behaviors were normative, their beliefs were a significant predictor of sexual violence (Locke & Mahalik, 2005). In addition, the Fourbet et al. (2006) study replicated the results of these beliefs about women. Because of these attitudes, some scholars have argued that fraternities reinforce rape myths, which lead to sexual violence (Choate, 2003). Thus, as these beliefs may be seen as normative by some members of fraternities, it may prevent a student from joining a fraternity. Furthermore, because fraternities often interact closely with sororities, this may also prevent someone to join a sorority.

In addition, the fear of being hazed may prevent students from joining a Greek organization. In some Greek organizations, hazing is seen as a rite of passage to be initiated into the organization (Sweet, 2004). By being a part of this process, it reinforces the perception of uniqueness students are gaining by their membership in the organization in comparison to others who are not a part of the organization (Perkins, Zimmerman, & Janosik, 2011). Although hazing has been banned by many Greek organizations, some choose to continue with these forms of initiation despite their national organization's stance on hazing (Kimbrough, 2002).

For students at an institution, fraternity and sorority life is one engagement opportunity that they can participate in. Although there are benefits and drawbacks for students who

participate in this engagement opportunity, there are other opportunities students can become engaged in at an institution. Another engagement opportunity for students to participate in is an institution's athletic program.

### Athletics

Another possibility for student engagement is a college or university's athletic program. For public universities that are defined as Division I, II, or NAIA, students have an opportunity to attend on an athletic scholarship ("NCAA Scholarships and Grants," 2016; "What About Financial Aid," 2016). By doing so, a student-athlete has an opportunity to attend their institution at a lower cost. Typically, a student who attends one of these institutions is recruited during their time as a high school student by the athletic program. Although the extant literature focuses on student athletes recruited to scholarship granting teams, this thesis will also extend the involvement to intramural sports teams. This is necessary because the focus of the study is on recruiting messages. The recruiting messages for scholarship positions are not open to a broad university community as intramurals are.

Intramural sports provide students with an opportunity to become engaged in their university community (Haines & Fortman, 2008). Intramural sports can provide an opportunity for students to play a particular sport on a team, or by themselves, but not have the schedule of a student-athlete. Intramurals are also voluntary so students are recruited to teams in the intramural league. Additionally, by participating in an intramural, a student has an opportunity to meet other students they may not have the chance to otherwise (Haines & Fortman, 2008). Similar to intramurals, a positive aspect for a student-athlete is that they have teammates who may become

their friends (Gaston-Gayles & Hu, 2009). The connection with other students should allow for an easier transition to a college or university. Although there are many benefits for being a student-athlete, there are also drawbacks.

Because of the practice schedule and academics, student-athletes can become isolated from the broader student community of a college or university (Clift & Mower, 2013; Paulie & Gibson, 2010). This isolation reflects another negative factor for a student who is engaged in an athletic program. In addition to a student's isolation from the campus community, another negative aspect of being a student-athlete is the time commitment.

Through their engagement in a sports team, student-athletes have rigorous schedules. Because student-athletes have to attend practices, workouts, and travel for competitions, students can have difficulty in managing their time (Adler & Adler, 1991; Lawrence, Harrison, & Stone, 2009). When athletics is out of balance with academics, students may dropout or fail to graduate because their grade point average does not meet the college or university's standards (Perrelli, 2004). Although intramurals do not have quite the time commitment, some do and that balance may still be part of the draw-back of the engagement opportunity. In addition to being engaged in Greek organizations and athletics, another engagement opportunity for students is to become employed.

### Student Employment

Student employment reflects a third way that students might engage in their community. Riggert, Boyle, Petrosko, Ash, and Rude-Parkins (2006) found that approximately 80% of all

college students are employed while completing their undergraduate education. Although some students receive scholarships and grants, students still rely on employment to pay for college expenses. Kuh (2008) argued on-campus employment is a form of student engagement.

One way to get an on-campus job is to participate in the federal work-study program. The federal work-study program provides a part-time position for students (“Federal Work-Study,” 2016). This program is based on a student’s expected family contribution, and only some students qualify for this program (“Federal Work-Study,” 2016).

In addition to work-study jobs, students can find opportunities on campus for other types of employment. Some of these opportunities include alumni fund caller, a resident assistant, library assistant, or a server in the dining hall. In addition to on-campus jobs, students have the opportunity to find employment at local, off-campus businesses.

Although there are many benefits to employment for a student, there are also negative aspects. Working students who are employed while attending school may struggle balancing their time between work and academics (Salisbury, Pascarella, Padgett, & Blaich, 2012). Additionally, students that are employed may not have the opportunity to participate in other engagement opportunities in their campus community (Astin, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Riggert et al., 2006). In the engagement literature, these opportunities reflect positive ways to get engaged but each has drawbacks as well.

For this study, the three engagement opportunities that were reviewed were selected because they link to a specific factor of the theory of planned behavior model. In the TPB (Ajzen, 1985), there are three factors: attitudes toward the behavior, subjective norms, and perceived behavior control that influence behavioral intentions. In this study, fraternity and

sorority life was selected because it may link to subjective norms. Participation in intramurals was selected because it may link to attitudes towards the behavior. Employment was selected because it may link with perceived behavioral control. The theoretical framework is outlined in the next sections.

### Theory of Planned Behavior

The theory of planned behavior (TPB; Ajzen, 1985; Ajzen & Madden, 1986) predicts behavioral intentions and behaviors of an individual. The original conceptualization of the theory was the theory of reasoned action (TRA; Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). The theory of planned behavior extended TRA by including an additional component, perceived behavioral control. As a result, the more inclusive model, TPB, will be the framework for this study.

In the TPB model, there are three factors that contribute to the formation of a behavioral intention: the attitude towards the behavior, subjective norms, and the perceived behavioral control (Ajzen, 1985). The first factor, attitude towards the behavior, can be described as an “individual’s positive or negative evaluation of performing the behavior” (Ajzen, 1985, p. 12). Attitudes reflect the behavioral beliefs about performing a behavior and the evaluation of these beliefs.

The second factor, subjective norms, reflects the peer influence component of the model (Ajzen, 1985). Ajzen (1985) states that subjective norms are “a person’s belief that most important referents would approve or disapprove of his[sic] attempting to perform a given behavior” (p. 32). The subjective norm component of the model is composed of normative

beliefs and the motivation that individuals have to comply (Ajzen & Madden, 1986). In essence, this component reflects how friends, family, classmates and peer referents would evaluate the performance of a behavior.

The third factor, perceived behavioral control, reflects an individual's efficacy and belief that he or she can perform a behavior (Ajzen, 1985). Ajzen (1985) states that perceived behavioral control "can service as an estimate of actual control and, together with intention to try, it can be used to predict the probability of a successful behavioral attempt" (p. 34). According to Ajzen and Madden (1986), if a person believes that he or she possesses the necessary skills to perform the behavior, they will be more motivated to do so.

According to the TPB (Ajzen, 1985), attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control together form behavioral intentions. Behavioral intentions and perceived behavioral control predict behavior.

TPB has been widely replicated (Ajzen, 2012) and broadly applied. For example, the TPB has been used to analyze substance abuse treatment (e.g., Zetser & Ajzen, 2014), intentions to become pregnant (e.g., Ajzen & Klobas, 2013), and smoking (e.g., Moan & Rise, 2005). In communication, the TPB has framed studies on recycling behavior (Park, Levine & Sharkey, 1998), condom use (Greene, Hale, & Rubin, 1997), and student-faculty interactions concerning grades (Henningsen, Valde, Russell, & Russell, 2011).

For this study, TPB will be used to analyze persuasive messages that are used to recruit students to participate in engagement opportunities. In particular, the types of messages that students suggest would be persuasive to them will be coded to reflect if the message targets attitudes, subjective norms, or perceived behavioral control. An example of this can be

demonstrated by looking at recruiting messages for fraternity and sorority organizations. For each component of TPB, there are different factors that could convince a student to join. The attitude towards behavior for a student joining a Greek organization can be seen as the benefits or the risks of joining an organization. For example, a message could reference the future employment networking available from sorority national organizations. The subjective norms for a student's decision to join would be the perceptions of their referent group, and whether or not they would support or disapprove of the student's engagement in the organization. For example, a message could encourage joining a fraternity because a friend is rushing too. The third component, perceived behavioral control, would examine whether or not the student could afford to join the organization due to membership fees. For example, a message could discuss the opportunity for a payment plan to pay the membership fees. Thus, when recruiting students to join an organization, messages could be more effective if they match the salient component of TPB.

Azjen (1971) studied messages. In his study, the effectiveness of a persuasive message was compared to the change in behavior in a participant's attitude or normative beliefs (Azjen, 1971). In this study, Azjen (1971) analyzed participants playing a game and found that "the type of persuasive message employed (attitudinal or normative) was found to interact significantly with the motivational orientation of the players (cooperation or competition in its effects on strategy choices" (p. 277). Although this study analyzed the difference of these message constructions between attitudinal and normative beliefs, the use of persuasive communication can be integrated in this study to understand how a student would be motivated to join an

organization. Students may construct persuasive messages to differentially link to the components of the TPB for each engagement opportunity similar to Ajzen's (1971) study.

Ajzen's (1971) research was conducted prior to the introduction of TPB but the same analogy should hold for perceived behavioral control. In this thesis, all three precursors to behavioral intentions can be addressed. The following research questions formally state the goals of the study.

RQ1: Are behavioral intentions to increase engagement predicted by attitudes, subjective norms or perceived behavioral control?

RQ2: Do students write recruiting messages for different engagement opportunities in a way that parallels attitudes, subjective norms, or perceived behavioral control?

RQ3: Do actively engaged students generate more persuasive recruiting messages than students who are not actively engaged?

## CHAPTER 3

### METHOD

The goals of this study were to determine if the recruitment messages created by participants paralleled specific components of TPB. The following chapter describes the procedures and methodology used for the data collection in this study.

#### Participants

The participants,  $N = 194$ , were undergraduate students enrolled in lower and upper division communication courses at a large, Midwestern university. The average age of the participants was 21.22,  $SD = 2.21$ , range = 18 to 33 years. The participants were primarily Caucasian 60.8%, but African-American 20.1%, Hispanic or Latino/a 11.8%, Asian/Asian American 4.6%, and Other 2.5% students also completed the survey.

#### Procedures

The survey for this study was sent to the Institutional Review Board for approval. Upon receiving approval from the Institutional Review Board, a description of the study with a link to

the survey was provided to the participants in the first or second week of a fifteen week semester. Participants for this study received course credit or extra credit at the determination of the instructor.

Participants completed an online survey that began with a consent form. Participants were then directed to an open-ended prompt that requested that the student write a recruiting message about joining a Greek organization, an intramural sport, or a campus employment opportunity. Students were randomly assigned to write a recruitment statement about one of the three engagement opportunities. After the open-ended section, students were asked questions related to student engagement and TPB. Specifically, the survey included measures of attitude towards increasing their own student engagement, subjective norms, perceived behavioral control, behavioral intentions, and several questions about their current engagement activities. After completion of the survey measures, participants were asked demographic questions. Upon completion, participants were directed to a separate survey that collected their name and course number to ensure the data they provided in the previous survey was anonymous.

### Coding

Approximately halfway through the data collection, the initial coding of the recruitment statements took place. A codebook was created to identify how the recruitment statements would be coded for the study. The codebook for this study included six codes to identify the recruitment statements that were created by the participants. The first three codes for this study followed from the theoretical framework of the TPB. After becoming more familiar with the responses

from the data set, the researcher added two codes to address common responses that did not reflect the TPB. The final code was an “other” category. The six codes for this study were the following: attitude towards the behavior, subjective norms, perceived behavioral control, information, visuals, and other.

The first code, *attitude towards the behavior*, can be described as an “individual’s positive or negative evaluation of the behavior” (Ajzen, 1985, p.12). An example of a recruitment statement from the data set is, “Always finding yourself bored after classes? Get active!”

The second code, *subjective norms*, can be described as “a person’s belief that most important referents would approve or disapprove of his/her attempting to perform a given behavior” (Ajzen, 1985, p. 32). An example of this code would be, “Bring your friends out to our fraternity event.”

The third code, *perceived behavioral control*, reflects an individual’s efficacy and belief that he or she can perform a behavior (Ajzen, 1985). An example of this code would be, “Want to make money?”

The final three codes were more general and followed from reviewing the initial responses. The fourth code for this study was *information*, which was defined as any reference to using text or general information to recruit a participant. Specifically, this code differentiates from attitudes towards the behavior because the information code does not consider the positive or negative implications of joining or participating in an engagement opportunity. The statements that were placed into this code were considered general information that did not pertain to a

specific component of TPB. An example of a statement that would be placed in this code is, “The time and location of the event.”

The fifth code was *visuals*, which was defined as a reference to incorporating visuals in a recruitment message. An example from the data set for this code is, “Flashy title.”

The final code that was created for the codebook was an “other” category. Other was defined as any example that was provided by a participant that did not fit well in any of the other categories. An example from the data set was, “Free Food.”

After the typology and codebook were created, a second coder blind to the research questions was trained to code for the study. The second coder was trained through an explanation of the typology, and coded the recruitment statements from the data set. The primary researcher met to discuss the categories, and differences in the interpretation of the data set. Once the primary researcher and the secondary coder completed coding the data set, intercoder reliability was calculated. The coding was reliable,  $\kappa = .72$ . The first coder then applied the typology to the second half of the data.

## Measures

All scales were measured on a seven-point scale. Variables were coded so that lower values reflected a greater endorsement of the construct. All measures were subjected to measurement analysis prior to calculating reliabilities.

The *attitude towards engagement* measure (e.g., “Getting involved in student engagement opportunities has a lot of benefits for students”) included four Likert items. The scale was reliable,  $\alpha = .91$ ,  $M = 1.89$ ,  $SD = .94$ .

The *subjective norm* measure (e.g., “Most of my friends would want me to get involved in the university community”) included five Likert items. The scale was reliable,  $\alpha = .88$ ,  $M = 2.41$ ,  $SD = 1.16$ .

The *perceived behavioral control* measure (e.g., “If it mattered to me, I could become involved in the university community”) included six Likert items. The scale was reliable  $\alpha = .91$ ,  $M = 2.10$ ,  $SD = 1.10$ .

The *behavioral intention* measure (e.g., “I intend to get more involved in the university community than I currently am”) included six Likert items. The scale was reliable  $\alpha = .98$ ,  $M = 3.03$ ,  $SD = 1.63$ .

The *engagement* measure (e.g., “I am involved in extracurricular activities”) included four Likert items. The scale was reliable  $\alpha = .92$ ,  $M = 4.34$ ,  $SD = 2.16$ .

## CHAPTER 4

### RESULTS

The goal of this study was to investigate how students create recruitment messages to persuade other students to join a Greek organization, intramural, or seek employment on campus. In this chapter, the results are provided to answer the research questions of the study.

#### Research Question 1

RQ1 questioned if a student's intention to become more engaged on campus was predicted by attitudes, subjective norms, or perceived behavioral control. The components of the TPB (i.e., attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control) were used in a regression analysis to predict behavioral intentions. The regression was statistically significant,  $F(3, 177) = 39.12, p < .001, R^2 = .40$ . Attitudes, ( $\beta = .29, p < .001$ ), and subjective norms, ( $\beta = .39, p < .001$ ), were statistically significant predictors in the model. Perceived behavioral control, ( $\beta = -.001, p = .99$ ), was not a significant predictor of behavioral intentions. In answer to RQ1, TPB attitudes and subjective norms are effective at predicting behavioral intentions. Behavioral intentions to become involved on campus were predicted by attitude towards the behavior and impressions of their referent group. Perceived behavioral control, or perception of their ability to

perform the behavior, was not a statistically significant predictor of a student's behavioral intentions.

## Research Question 2

RQ2 investigated recruitment messages that were created by students for a specific engagement opportunity. The research question focused on whether the recruiting messages would differ by the type of organization the message was designed to address. A chi square analysis was conducted to determine if the recruitment statements varied by organization. The analysis was statistically significant  $\chi^2(12) = 142.04, p < .001, \lambda = .41$  (see Table 1). In answer to RQ2, the recruitment statements that were coded for Greek life and intramural sports tended to reflect attitudes towards the behavior in the TPB. For on campus employment, recruitment statements focused on perceived behavioral control in the TPB. Thus, when students created recruitment statements for each engagement opportunity, their responses paralleled the specific predictors within the TPB framework. The messages varied by the type of organization.

Table 1  
Coded Recruitment Statements for Engagement Opportunities

Measures	Greek Life	Intramurals	Employment	Total
Attitude towards the behavior	27	33	4	64
Subjective Norms	7	0	0	7
Perceived behavioral control	1	1	49	51
Information	19	26	7	52
Visuals	3	1	1	5
Other	6	3	4	13
Total	63	65	65	193

### Research Question 3

To answer RQ3, the correlation between perceived persuasiveness of the generated recruited message and reported student engagement was calculated. The correlation was not statistically significant,  $r = .04$ ,  $p = .62$ . In answer to the research question, students did not perceive their recruiting messages differently if they were already involved in student engagement opportunities.

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION

The goal of this study was to investigate recruitment messages for student engagement opportunities. The TPB (Ajzen, 1985; 2012) was applied to this context to see if recruitment messages paralleled components from the theoretical framework. The results indicated that the TPB (Ajzen, 1985) framework was a good fit to the context and was applicable for understanding a student's perception of engagement opportunities. The findings from the study have implications about student engagement at an institution, a student's recruitment techniques, and research on TPB.

The findings of this study demonstrated that a student's intentions to become more engaged on campus were predicted by components of the TPB framework. Attitudes and subject norms were significant predictors of behavioral intentions. Thus, reported interest in becoming engaged on campus based upon their attitude towards engagement and whether or not their friends and family members believed it was beneficial. However, the perceived behavioral control was not a statistically significant predictor of behavioral intentions. Although the perceived behavioral control component was not a predictor of behavioral intentions, the TPB says that not all predictors will be relevant in all contexts. In higher education, students may perceive higher control, and that may make perceived behavioral control less likely to predict behavior. The results from this study are parallel to a study conducted by Henningsen, Valde, Russell, and Russell (2011) that analyzed interactions among students and faculty about

disappointing grades. In that study, attitudes and subjective norms were statistically significant predictors of behavioral intentions and perceived behavioral control was not. It is possible that students in the context of higher education decision-making do not feel that they lack efficacy to perform behaviors.

Another finding of this study is that recruitment messages that were created for different engagement opportunities fit the TPB framework. The recruitment messages that were created by participants were related to components of the TPB. Messages that were created about Greek life and intramural participation reflected the attitude towards the behavior component of the TPB. Participants felt that the benefits of these organizations would be effective tools to persuade students to join. Campus employment, on the other hand, paralleled the perceived behavioral control component of the TPB. For employment opportunities, recruitment messages focused on the control of students to seek employment and whether or not they needed the pay from a job. The results of this study provide implications about recruitment messages for student engagement opportunities. The TPB provides a framework to conceptualize the similarities and differences in recruiting messages for students for different engagement opportunities at an institution. The results extend the TPB.

The findings are also informative to the student engagement research. Student engagement is a contributing factor for retention at an institution, as it decreases the chances of alienation in the campus community (Liu, 2010). In organizations like fraternities and sororities, students are expected to recruit and retain members. By doing so, chapters are able to stay active as an organization on campus, and be recognized nationally. However, the results of this study suggest that engaged students did not perceive that they were better at recruiting messages than

students with less campus engagement experience. Thus, students may benefit from programming related to how to recruit students to join organizations at their institution. That type of programming should help student engagement opportunities to reach students who are looking to identify with their campus communities. Additionally, this programming would also provide students an opportunity to learn how to reach out to recruit students who may be concerned about the drawbacks of joining a particular organization.

Although some organizations have conferences and workshops to teach students how to recruit for these types of organizations, each institution is unique and may need more specialized programming to help students learn to recruit. Thus, institutions should implement programming to teach students how to recruit. By implementing programs, an institution can teach a student how to effectively communicate the benefits of being engaged on campus, and discuss how to communicate with students who may be concerned about specific drawbacks of an organization. This allows students to be prepared when recruiting students to join their organization, and may lead to better retention on campus (Liu, 2010).

Another aspect of the findings with implications for the student engagement research relates to the recruiting messages. The attitude related messages that were written for Greek organizations and intramural athletics tended to include information but campus employment messages tended to focus on perceived behavioral control. The student engagement literature (e.g., Finn & Zimmer, 2012) tends to treat engagement as a dichotomous construct: engaged or not engaged. The findings from this study suggest that engagement may not be dichotomous but richer in conceptualization. The different types of engagement are reflective of different types of goals and needs.

The findings of this study also have implications for research in persuasion. The category “visuals” emerged from the data during coding. When writing recruitment statements, some participants noted the importance of the visual aspects of the message. Students realized the importance visually appealing messages to attract their intended audience’s attention. Little research has focused on this aspect of recruiting messages.

### Limitations and Directions for Future Research

One limitation of the study is that only three student engagement opportunities were selected. Although there are many engagement opportunities at an institution, the three that were selected for this study were selected strategically. Future research should consider other engagement opportunities and determine what aspects are positive or negatively associated with recruitment and participation in those opportunities.

With respect to the sample, participants were recruited from lower and upper division communication courses. As such, another limitation for this study is that the participants were from a convenience sample. Although the students that participated in the study provided valuable insight on recruiting messages and behavioral intentions, the results may not be indicative of the entire campus community. Future research should consider replicating this study with a random sample.

Another limitation for this study was the design only included one campus community. Although this study provided significant insight about message construction and student engagement, the results may not be representative of all colleges and universities. Future

research should consider sampling more than one institution in a study and consider the differences between private and public colleges and universities.

### Conclusion

This study investigated recruiting messages for campus engagement opportunities from the framework of TPB. The study was informative for communication and higher education research. Students wrote recruiting messages reflecting TPB components. Specifically, Greek life and intramurals were framed in attitudes; employment in perceived behavioral control. The study results suggest that future retention and engagement research would benefit from incorporating the TPB.

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APPENDIX

STUDENT ENGAGEMENT SURVEY

You have been recruited to participate in a survey about student engagement in organizations on campus. In particular, you will be asked to write a recruitment message that would convince a student to join one of several types of organizations on campus. Additionally, you will be asked complete scales related to the positive or negative benefits of being in an organization, your current level of engagement, and demographic questions. The survey takes about 20 minutes to complete. Your responses on the survey are anonymous. Participation information will be collected in a way that we will not be able to connect your survey responses to your participation information. The only reasonably foreseeable risk to participation is the breach of confidentiality due to a third party intercepting the data. The survey is, however, hosted on a secure web service, and the responses are anonymous. Participation in the study is voluntary and you can withdraw from the study without penalty at any point. If you have questions about the study, please feel free to contact the primary researchers' faculty supervisor, Dr. Mary Lynn Henningsen at 815-314-4575. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the NIU Office of Research Compliance, 815-753-8588.

Having read the description of the study, do you consent to participate?

- Yes
- No

The questions below will ask you to design a recruitment message for a fraternity or sorority on campus. The questions below will ask you to describe the words or phrases, the medium, and the design of the message.

What medium would you use? (e.g., in person invitation, text message, flyer, sidewalk chalk)

How would you word or phrase the message to have someone join a fraternity or sorority? (e.g., what title, information, or words would you use)

What would the design of the message be? (e.g., font, visuals, etc)

The questions below will ask you to design a recruitment message for an intramural athletic group on campus. The questions below will ask you to describe the words or phrases, the medium, and the design of the message.

What medium would you use? (e.g., in person invitation, text message, flyer, sidewalk chalk)

How would you word or phrase the message to have someone join the intramural athletic group? (e.g., what title, information, or words would you use)

What would the design of the message be? (e.g., font, visuals, etc)

The questions below will ask you to design a recruitment message for part time employment on campus. The questions below will ask you to describe the words or phrases, the medium, and the design of the message.

What medium would you use? (e.g., in person invitation, text message, flyer, sidewalk chalk)

How would you word or phrase the message to have someone apply for part time employment on campus? (e.g., what title, information, or words would you use)

What would the design of the message be? (e.g., font, visuals, etc)

Are you in a fraternity or sorority?

- Yes
- No
- Other, please specify \_\_\_\_\_

Do you participate in athletics or intramural athletics on campus?

- Yes
- No
- Other, please specify \_\_\_\_\_

Do you have a part time or full time job on campus?

- Yes
- No
- Other, please specify \_\_\_\_\_



Greek organizations (fraternities and sororities) are...  
 \_\_\_\_\_ On a scale of good to bad: (1) to (7)

Greek organizations (fraternities and sororities) are...  
 \_\_\_\_\_ On a scale of harmful to beneficial: (1) to (7)

Greek organizations (fraternities and sororities) are...  
 \_\_\_\_\_ On a scale of fair to unfair: (1) to (7)

Greek organizations (fraternities and sororities) are...  
 \_\_\_\_\_ On a scale of wise to foolish: (1) to (7)

Greek organizations (fraternities and sororities) are...  
 \_\_\_\_\_ On a scale of negative to positive: (1) to (7)

Greek organizations (fraternities and sororities) are...  
 \_\_\_\_\_ On a scale of wrong to right: (1) to (7)

Athletic groups like intramural sports are...  
 \_\_\_\_\_ On a scale of good to bad: (1) to (7)

Athletic groups like intramural sports are...  
 \_\_\_\_\_ On a scale of harmful to beneficial: (1) to (7)

Athletic groups like intramural sports are...  
 \_\_\_\_\_ On a scale of fair to unfair: (1) to (7)

Athletic groups like intramural sports are...  
 \_\_\_\_\_ On a scale of wise to foolish: (1) to (7)

Athletic groups like intramural sports are...  
 \_\_\_\_\_ On a scale of negative to positive: (1) to (7)

Athletic groups like intramural sports are...  
 \_\_\_\_\_ On a scale of wrong to right: (1) to (7)

Part time or full time jobs on campus are...  
 \_\_\_\_\_ On a scale of good to bad: (1) to (7)

Part time or full time jobs on campus are...  
 \_\_\_\_\_ On a scale of harmful to beneficial: (1) to (7)

Part time or full time jobs on campus are...  
\_\_\_\_\_ On a scale of fair to unfair: (1) to (7)

Part time or full time jobs on campus are...  
\_\_\_\_\_ On a scale of wise to foolish: (1) to (7)

Part time or full time jobs on campus are...  
\_\_\_\_\_ On a scale of negative to positive: (1) to (7)

Part time or full time jobs on campus are...  
\_\_\_\_\_ On a scale of wrong to right: (1) to (7)

Student engagement is when a student on campus gets involved with their university community. Student engagement takes a lot of forms like student organizations, participating in extracurricular or co-curricular activities, student government, athletic teams in the local community or campus, and fraternities and sororities. There is no right or wrong answer to these questions, but we are interested in your opinion. Please describe your level of agreement with each statement by clicking a response.









Please list all of the campus organizations, jobs, or sports that you are involved in:

Approximately how many hours last week were you engaged in activities on campus other than classes?

How much time do you spend in a typical week engaged in the campus community?

There is no right or wrong answer to these questions, but we are interested in your opinion. Please describe your level of agreement with each statement by clicking a response.





I have been an officer in a campus activity. (19)	<input type="radio"/>						
I have been an officer in a campus organization. (20)	<input type="radio"/>						

The final questions on this survey ask you to describe your background, and demographic information.

What is your sex?

- Male
- Female

What is your race or ethnicity?

- African American/Black
- Asian/Asian-American
- Caucasian/White
- Hispanic/Latino/Latina
- Native American/Pacific Islander
- Other\_\_\_\_\_

What age did you turn on your last birthday?

Please select your year in school.

- First Year
- Second Year
- Third Year
- Fourth Year
- Fifth Year
- Other\_\_\_\_\_

What is your major?

Thank you very much for your time and completing the survey. To record your participation information, please click on the link below. You should be directed to a different survey page that will allow you to report participation credit information. Thank you. Please click the red box below.