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# The Effects of Greek Life on Political Participation and Interaction Involvement

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## ABSTRACT

Institutions of higher education are constantly trying to learn more about their own student population. Whether this means a student's academic performance, social life, personality traits, or political involvement it is important to study the lives of university students so as to better understand and serve that population. Specifically, studying the relationship between communication and political participation among college students is important for those working in higher education, researching voting behaviors, and for the general public. Students in Greek Letter Societies (GLS), also known as fraternities/sororities or social clubs, are a perfect population to study the effects of communication on political participation. Many of the political, as well as cultural and business, leaders in the U.S. culture were at one time members of a GLS, and perhaps there is a link between participation in a GLS and political participation. Using theories of Social Capital, Political Participation, and Interaction Involvement, this research studies the effects of communication on political participation. 497 university students participated in a survey and a correlation between political participation and interaction involvement was found. However, there was no relationship found between participation in a GLS and political participation. The results of this research suggest that participation in a GLS does not make one more likely to participate in political activities, but a higher level of interaction involvement does correlate with higher levels of political participation.

The Effects of Greek Life on Political Participation and Interaction Involvement

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Graduate School

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Master of Arts

Communication

By

Philip Stephen Lamborn

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION, REVIEW OF LITERATURE, & RATIONALE

#### **Introduction**

Many politicians, businesspeople, and others in positions of power were a part of Greek Letter Societies (GLS) in their undergraduate careers. One needs only to look at the U.S. government to see the large number of Greek life alumni active in politics; twelve of the last eighteen presidents, thirty-seven U.S. senators, and more than fifty U.S. representatives were involved in some form of Greek life (Desantis, 2007; North-American Interfraternity Conference, 2016). It is obvious that participation in a fraternity or sorority can play a large role in the lives of members. While many of those who were active in a fraternity or sorority go on to serve in politics, what about other members of these groups?

It is logical to assume, given the number of GLS alumni involved in politics as a vocation, there is a possibility that many other GLS alumni are involved in politics in a non-professional matter. Is there perhaps some quality common to GLS members that lends itself to those members being politically active? Traits such as social capital and interaction involvement have been measured in the past to gauge how relationships and social networks affect individuals in their daily lives (Pike, 2000; Cegala, 1981). Using the lens of interaction involvement, measuring the degree to which people interact with one another, as well as



social capital as a theoretical framework, this study seeks to better understand how participation in a GLS influences political participation.

## **Literature Review**

### **Social Capital**

Social capital, and social capital theory, is the belief that “social networks have value” (Putnam, 2000, p. 19). Just like the ability to build a house or operate a heavy machinery has value and can affect one’s productivity, so does the ability to maintain a social network. The term was perhaps first used in 1916 by school supervisor Hanifan (1916):

If he may come into contact with his neighbor, and they with other neighbors, there will be an accumulation of social capital, which may immediately satisfy his social needs and which may bear a social potentiality sufficient to the substantial improvement of living conditions in the whole community. (p. 1)

This definition of social capital essentially made the argument that when people meet with one another, on a regular basis or not, they will inevitably form bonds that can lead to the development of mutually beneficial relationships. Social capital was again popularized by Jane Jacobs, who was an urban studies activist. The term was used, according to social policy scholar Ferragina (2010), “to criticize the artificial development of American cities. Urban spaces were designed without taking into account pre-existing social links, destroying a capital which would be impossible to reproduce” (p. 77). Jacobs did not go into great detail explaining social capital, but she clearly uses the idea to explain how social networks are vital to the health of a democracy. Other works, like those of Bourdieu have also helped to develop the idea of social capital. Sociologist Pierre

Bourdieu's beliefs on capital aided in the creation of a universal definition of social capital. Bourdieu (1986/2011) defined capital as

accumulated labor (in its materialized form or its 'incorporated,' embodied form) which, when appropriated on a private, i.e., exclusive, basis by agents or groups of agents, enables them to appropriate social energy in the form of reified or living labor. (p. 1)

In Bourdieu's view capital is not just some nebulous or abstract idea; to Bourdieu, capital is a tangible and quantifiable measure. Capital is what makes people separate from animals and, although this creates inequalities at times, is what differentiates people from each other. Without capital, humanity would all be essentially the same. Social capital, according to Bourdieu (1986/2011), is

the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition – or in other words, to membership in a group – which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectivity-owned capital, a 'credential' which entitles them to credit, in the various senses of the word. (p. 253)

The ability to form relationships can lead to direct benefits. By forming a network of relationships an individual can reap certain benefits, like the prestige gained from being in an elite association, or by obtaining valuable contacts in one's career field. In some ways, Bourdieu believed that social capital favored society's elites, as they possessed more social networking opportunities than most.

Ferragina (2010) made the argument that Bourdieu believed social capital was "created through the belonging to some group, where people are endowed with common properties and also with permanent and stable links" (p. 78). In this view, because some individuals are simply born into larger or more prestigious groups, without working hard to develop these networks, social capital is unevenly or unfairly distributed throughout society. Just by belonging to a certain

group, some have more opportunities in life than others. Social capital was again brought to the forefront of academic thought by the work of Robert Putnam.

Putnam saw social capital as merely a tool to be used, to the benefit or detriment of both individuals and the community at large. According to Putnam (2000), the individual benefit is the formation of “connections that benefit our own interests”. For the individual, the value comes from the creation of relationships that aid the interests of that individual. This value may be in getting a job through someone you know or even having a friend to help with home improvement project. Society then can be affected by these relationships. In some extensive social networks, like those in service organizations, society is impacted by the work those organizations do for the community. Without the formation of social capital among the members, that impact would likely not exist. Social capital does not look the same for every person; the bonds formed and how they are used from person to person can vary greatly. However, all forms of social capital have certain elements in common.

According to sociologist Coleman (1988), social capital “is not a single entity but a variety of different identities, with two elements in common: they all consist of some aspect of social structures, and they facilitate certain actions of actors-whether persons or corporate actors-within the structure” (p. 98). So although one person’s possession of social capital may look different than another’s, both people’s social capital will have similar characteristics. What this means is that virtually all forms of social capital can be identified as such,

regardless of the actors involved. That being said, there are varying levels of social capital in different people. Political scientist Reid (2009) wrote:

Specifically, social capital is distributed differently among the types of networks to which people have access. Since people have variations in their networks, then this naturally causes some people to have connections that are more extensive and diverse than others. (p. 4)

Like any other talent or skill, the ability to develop differs not only from person to person, but from group to group as well. People, or groups of people, with greater access to those like them, and those different from them, have a greater potential for cultivating social capital than those with lesser access to social networks.

There are two types of social capital people create and possess.

Putnam (2000) originally theorized that the two types of social capital are bridging and bonding. Bonding social capital refers to the social capital that increases the solidarity in an already existing group. Sociologist and public health scholars Leung, Chin, and Petrescu-Prahova (2016) wrote that “bonding social capital tends to bring people within a group closer together through cohesive or dense network ties” (p. 203). Bonding capital is necessary as it allows trust to develop among close friends and social groups. Bridging social capital, according to sociologists van Oorschot, Arts, and Geliessen (2006), “is outward looking and encompasses people across diverse social cleavages.” This type of social capital brings different groups of people together and is more inclusionary than bonding. Both types of social capital are important to maintain a healthy society. These types of social capital help individuals to build trust in both their close social networks as well as society as a whole. Additionally, social capital can be broken down into three different dimensions.

Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998) identified three dimensions of social capital: relational, structural, and cognitive. The relational dimension refers to the relationships people form and maintain with others. Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998) write that social capital are “those assets created and leveraged through relationships” (p. 244). This is social capital in its most basic, and perhaps obvious, form. Relational social capital is built on things like trust between community members; as Putnam (1993b) puts it “trust lubricates social life” (p. 38). The structural dimension of social capital is shaped by the social structures in society as a whole. Essentially, the structural dimension is the network of relationships each person is a part of. Scott (2011) wrote that “structures are built from relations” and that “these relations connect pairs of agents to larger relational systems” (p. 3-4). There is a sort of symbiotic relationship between the relational and structural dimensions; the relations one forms are in part due to one’s social network, but that network is built by the relationships one forms. One needs a larger network to help form relationships, but that network is constructed by those same relationships. Finally, the cognitive dimension is, according to Al Mamun, et al. (2016), “is built from the shared meanings and shared interpretations between actors in a relationship” (p. 365). This dimension is less about the system of the relationship, or the relationship itself, and more about the intellectual and mental gains made through shared experiences. With such a broad and far reaching topic comes no shortage of criticism.

Social capital, especially in its earlier forms, was met with several criticisms. One of the major criticisms of Putnam’s social capital was that while

Putnam brought up some good points, he was too concerned with the problem of a lack of social capital, and thought that simply renewing social organizations would help solve the problem. One of these critics, Etzioni (2001), wrote:

those concerned with restoring community cannot limit themselves to the study of social bonds; they must analyze the mechanisms through which new moral cultures are formed and study what will prevent them from locking on to values that are incompatible with a free and fair society. (p. 514)

The argument here is not that the questions that Putnam raised were based on poor or inaccurate data; in fact, it is quite the opposite. Etzioni posits that Putnam's view is strong enough to warrant the original framing of the problem, the decline of social capital, but simply questions Putnam's lack of direction in solving said problem. While Putnam may not have answered that question fully, others have certainly picked up where Putnam left off in this regard (Portes, 2014; Adler & Kwon, 2002; Browning, 2009). Another criticism is the uncertainty of the term "social capital". According to Glanville and Bienenstock (2009), "critics have argued that the term social capital is too vague or general to be a useful concept" (p. 1507). Essentially, the broad definitions assigned to social capital rendered it useless. Other scholars have identified certain negatives of social capital; this is less of a criticism of the theory behind social capital, and more so a criticism of the lack of attention paid to the downsides of social capital. Sociologist Besser (2009) wrote that social capital can result in "negative consequences for excluded community residents when special interest groups use social capital to achieve their goals" (p. 186). This criticism is not uncommon, and while there may be

some validity to this argument, social capital remains a common topic in modern day research, and continues to grow in popularity.

Social capital has become an even more popular research topic in recent years. Moody and Paxton (2009) write that research on social capital “has grown dramatically in recent years” (p. 1491). Some of the earlier works focused on communities and smaller social networks, whereas much of the latest research has focused on how social capital impacts the workplace, economy, and other areas of a larger magnitude, just to name a few (Burt, 2005; Russo & Perrini, 2010; Zhang, Lettice, & Zhao, 2015). Part of the reason for this divergence from what was essentially three major works (those of Bourdieu, Coleman, and Putnam) is in large part due to the ambiguity of the term “social capital” used by those early theorists. As previously mentioned, social capital has been criticized for this vagueness (Glanville & Bienenstock, 2009), but it is also a strength, as the lack of a specific definition has allowed many different fields to study social capital. Baker and Faulkner (2009) wrote that “social capital is a growth industry. This concept appears with increasing frequency in sociology, political science, organizational theory, and economics, as well as the worlds of policy and practice” (p. 1531); additionally, Kwon and Adler (2014) found that social capital “has blossomed into a field” (412). Social capital has evolved from a trend in sociological research into a research topic spanning many different disciplines, one of which is political science and political communication. The creation of social capital, especially in the context of bridging and bonding, has the potential to greatly impact the political world as well.

Social capital and political involvement are often times interrelated. A high level of social capital can be associated with a higher level of political engagement or activity (Brehm & Rahn 1997; Knack, 2002; Putnam 2000, 1993a). Political scientist Keele (2007) wrote that social capital often times “connotes a belief that there is some chance of bringing about social change or control through the established political process” (p. 243). Those who are heavily connected to their surrounding social environment are much more likely to trust their political process, and therefore are more likely to be politically active. Political scientists Brehm and Rahn (1997) found that there exists in communities a “presence of social capital in the form of a tight reciprocal relationship between civic engagement and interpersonal trust” (p. 1017). Hypothetically, this creates a “virtuous circle” wherein an increase of civic participation results in an increase in interpersonal trust, which then leads to an increase in civic participation. While there is some debate to the validity of that argument, it remains that there is evidence to suggest that lower levels of what can be described as social capital are associated with lower levels of political activity. While this paper does seek to find any relationship between social capital and political engagement, it specifically wishes to do so within the context of Greek Letter societies on college campuses.

### **Social Capital and Greek Life Participation**

The research on the effects of Greek life and fraternity/sorority participation on social capital is limited. Brehm and Rahn (1997) included “fraternal organizations”, such as local fraternities or sororities, as examples of associations that are “manifestations of



community interaction” (p. 1005) and, therefore, help to create social capital. Economist Glaeser (2001) also wrote that “many times membership in fraternities or sororities serves as the basis for social capital formation later in life” (p. 17). There is clearly research that references the effects of fraternity membership and participation, but little that focuses on it. Some researchers have found a connection between college extracurricular activities, like attending football games, and the creation of social capital (Clopton & Finch, 2010). However, much of the research on Greek life involvement relates mostly to academic success. While little research has been done on how specifically participation in a fraternity or sorority affects social capital, there is existing research on how membership and participation in a Greek Letter Society (GLS) influences on-campus involvement. Economists Walker, Martin, and Hussey (2014) found that “Greek membership leads to higher levels of involvement in and satisfaction with campus social life” (p. 218). According to Communication and Higher Education scholar Pike (2000), “Greek students reported significantly higher levels of social involvement and gains than did non-Greek students” (p. 118). Pike (1990, 2000, 2003) has consistently found that students involved in GLS tend to be more involved on campus and make greater gains in personal and social development than students who are not active in a GLS. It could be assumed, then, that those involved in a GLS would demonstrate increased social capital. One way in which to determine if there is a difference in “social capital” between those in a GLS and those not in a GLS, is by measuring the interaction involvement of these students.

## **Interaction Involvement**

Interaction involvement is defined by communication scholar Cegala (1981) as “the extent to which an individual partakes in a social environment” (p. 109). How much someone interacts with their surroundings directly affects their physical and emotional behavior. This impacts how an individual lives their life and can have a great effect on their outlook on life, hobbies, and activities they are involved in. Interaction involvement is a crucial component of interpersonal communication. Cegala (2009) wrote that interaction involvement measures “being aware of his or her own thoughts/feelings about messages from others, as well as attending to the likely meanings other people intend for their messages” (p. 525). Clearly, then, interaction involvement is key to both sending and receiving messages. Interaction involvement has its roots in the research of Erving Goffman.

Goffman’s research is the basis for much of Interaction Involvement. According to Goffman (1967), “every person lives in a world of social encounters” (p. 5). Humans are social beings. It is impossible to live life without interacting with other humans on a regular basis. This means that no matter how competent someone is at communicating with others, that person still is required to somehow interact and attempt to communicate with other people. Equally important to Interaction Involvement is Goffman’s idea of the “face.” Goffman (1967) wrote that the face is “the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact” (p. 5). A person’s “face” is key to interaction involvement. The “face” is determined by how an individual appears to others; this appearance is based on verbal and nonverbal cues. If interaction involvement measures how effectively an individual is

aware of his or her own thoughts and feelings, in addition to an awareness of others' messages, then Goffman's "face" is clearly seen in that measurement. Two other elements of Interaction Involvement seen in Goffman's work are attentiveness and perceptiveness.

Perceptiveness, according to Goffman (1967), is when a person is "aware of the interpretations that others may have placed upon his acts and the interpretations that he ought perhaps to place upon theirs" (p.13). This trait is seen in Interaction Involvement also. In order to be aware of one's own feelings as well as the feelings of others, one must demonstrate some modicum of perceptiveness. Cegala (2009) wrote that perceptiveness is the "ability to determine and integrate meanings associated with self and other(s) and generally understand what is going on in a particular social encounter" (p. 527).

Perceptiveness requires an individual to competently interact with her or his environment. This definition goes hand in hand with Goffman's, and both provide a solid foundation for Interaction Involvement. Attentiveness is another component of Interaction Involvement.

Attentiveness is the ability to be aware of one's surroundings. Cegala (2009) defines attentiveness as "an individual's attention to visual and auditory sources of information in the immediate social environment" (p. 527). Attentiveness does not seek to interpret what is happening, but merely to notice that something is happening. Goffman (1967) wrote that in a social interaction "the spontaneous involvement of the participants in an official focus of attention must be called forth and sustained" (p. 134). The basic foundation of any interaction is attentiveness. Without this trait it is impossible to have any sort of genuine or real interaction with a person or group of people.

Attentiveness and perceptiveness are directly linked. According to Cegala (1981), “inattentiveness would appear to preclude perceptiveness” (p. 112). So if perceptiveness is the degree to which one can accurately discern the meanings of messages, both from oneself and others, then it presupposes a certain level of attentiveness. Without the ability to pay attention to what is happening in one’s immediate environment, then one cannot hope to make a judgement about the meanings of messages happening in that environment. Both attentiveness and perceptiveness are needed for a high level of interaction involvement. Cegala (1981) wrote that interaction involvement is “the general tendency for an individual to demonstrate both attentiveness and perceptiveness in interactions” (p. 112). However, a third trait, responsiveness, is also seen in interaction involvement

Originally, perceptiveness and attentiveness, both derived from Goffman’s work, were the factors measured by the interaction involvement scale. Eventually, a third factor was created. This factor, responsiveness, is related to perceptiveness but includes certain aspects that differentiate itself from perceptiveness. Responsiveness, according to Cegala, Savage, Brunner, and Conrad (1982), is the “tendency to react mentally to one’s social circumstance and adapt by knowing what to say and when to say it” (p. 233). While perceptiveness measures how accurately an individual understands a message, responsiveness measures how well that individual responds to the message. Responsiveness, though not directly addressed in Goffman’s work, is derived from it. Cegala (2009) claimed that “responsiveness is important to Goffman’s notion of social acts, the pattern of verbal and nonverbal behavior that constitutes the expressive order” (p. 527). The entire definition of interaction involvement is based on these previously

formed ideas of Goffman's. Attentiveness, perceptiveness, and responsiveness are all seen in how interaction involvement measures how well a person can interact in social situations.

An individual cannot accurately or effectively engage others socially unless that person can correctly gauge what the meaning of the conversation is. Highly involved people are "viewed by others as generally competent interpersonal communicators" (Cegala, et al., 1982, p. 229). The highly involved person is able to understand the messages being relayed to him or her and better participate in a conversation. Vice versa, a low involved person is likely to be perceived as a poor interpersonal communicator because she or he is, to an extent, removed from the interaction. This can be seen in everyday life, as often times the person who never speaks up or seems to be in a daze is perceived as being a subpar communicator. This is not to say that those who self-identify as highly involved or low involved people cannot experience moments of both high and low involvement. Everyone at some point will experience some moment of high or low involvement. Cegala (1981) claimed that

most likely everyone has experienced moments of low interaction involvement. Embarrassment, preoccupation, boredom, confusion, and contemplation are among the experiences that may prompt less involvement in interaction. These occurrences appear to be a 'natural' part of the human communication process. (p.113)

So while most people will lean to the high or low level of the interaction involvement scale, it is normal for people to have both high and low level interactions throughout their lives. Much of the research on interaction involvement has been in relation to a learning environment.

College students have made up most of the recent research into interaction involvement. Much of this research has attempted to ascertain the relationship

between interaction involvement and academic success (Umphrey, Wickersham, & Sherblom, 2008; Carton & Goodboy, 2015). According to Communication scholar Frymier (2005), interaction involvement has been “associated with increased affect toward the instructor, increased state motivation to study, and satisfaction with the classroom communication” (p. 200). In other words, those with a high level of interaction involvement are perhaps better equipped to excel in the classroom environment. These studies have been a significant shift from the interpersonal communication roots of the foundational studies to instructional communication. There is currently a lack of research on the relationship between interaction involvement and the lives of university students outside of the classroom. That being said, between the earlier studies of interaction involvement in the field of interpersonal communication and the recent studies in the field of instructional communication, specifically with university students, there is ample evidence to suggest that interaction involvement may have an impact on the lives of university students outside of the classroom. One of the ways in which this study hopes to research that specific area, is through the political participation of current university students.

### **Political Participation**

Political participation encompasses a broad array of activities. Political scientists Verba, Scholzman, and Brady (1995) defined political participation as “activity that has the intent or effect of influencing government action” (p. 38). This is a necessarily broad term that, as stated earlier, includes many different types of participation. According to political scientist van Deth (2014), political participation “is considered to be an abstract

concept (measured as a continuum) covering these specific modes of participation as manifestations or expressions (or positions on a continuum)” (p. 351). Political participation, as a general term, is not one specific measurement; rather, it is the means by which many different politically motivated actions can be measured. Some researchers, like Communication scholars Brough & Shresthova (2011), even suggest that political participation can be anything that seeks “to influence or change existing power relations” (para. 13). By this definition, an action does not need to be directly related to the government to be political. While this is a valid definition in some scenarios, this paper will mainly operate using definitions of political participation related to the realm of government. Political participation can be broken down into two groups, individual/single activity or collective/multiple activity.

Single activity, or individual, political participation is usually seen as just voting. Political scientists Ekman and Amna (2012) claim that “voting was perceived as the primary way for a citizen to make his or her voice heard in the political system” (p. 285). For years, most measurements of political participation viewed voting as the most important aspect of participation. If influencing government action is the operative definition of political participation, then voting would seem to be the chief means by which to do that. Indeed, voting is perhaps the most important component of political participation. Verba and Nie (1987) also included voting as one of their four dimensions of participation. While there are three other dimensions, according to their typology, voting is the only “singular” activity. Voting is also seen as a “conventional” form of participating (Barnes & Kaase, 1979). This is “conventional” because it is tried and true and is the basis for democracy; without voting there is little room for effective political

participation in a healthy democracy. For centuries, people have participated by voting for the candidates and issues they were passionate about. This strong democratic tradition continues today, even if in some democratic nations voter turnout is down. Other forms of singular political participation, though not included in Verba and Nie's typology, include acts like writing or contacting one's local congressman, senator, etc. Ekman and Amna (2012) refer to this as "contact activity" and classify it as individual activity because, while it may not be anonymous, like voting, it is still a single person trying to "influence the political agenda or political outcomes" (p. 289). Voting remains the most important or common method of singular political participation, though it is important to keep in mind other singular forms like writing one's legislative representatives.

Collective, or group, political participation encompasses a wide array of political activities. Many of these activities fall under the umbrella of "conventional" participation as well. These include rallies, community events, and any activity in a political party or group (Pacheco & Owen, 2015). Conventional collective participatory acts don't go against any social or cultural norms and are generally seen as positive ways to express political opinions. Many of these events are not as direct as voting, but can have a great effect on the political process. One measure of success for any political candidate is how many people are attending his or her campaign rallies. Again, the ultimate measure of success is whether or not the candidate won the election, but rallies and other collective forms of participation are very important to the democratic process. Unconventional collective participation, while perhaps less common than simply voting, is also an integral part of the democratic process. Many citizens engage in these collective forms of participation not necessarily to make a direct political impact, like voting, but to make a



statement to those in power. Political scientist Lohmann (1993) wrote that “major policy shifts are often preceded by political action: people sign petitions, take part in demonstrations, or participate in violent riots to express their dissatisfaction with the status quo” (p. 319). Many of these unconventional group forms of participation are completely valid; meaning, they actually can cause policy change. Additionally, these forms of participation, though still unconventional, are not limited to the fringes of society. Political scientist Rochon (1990) argued that “the tactics of mass mobilization and public demonstration are no longer limited to disadvantaged racial, linguistic, ideological, generational, and sexual groups. . .” (p.299). Historically, major protests and other group forms of political participation were generally limited to those in the minority; now, many of those in majority groups take part in these events as well, increasing the effectiveness. While these activities may not have the direct effect of a vote, they still provide a way for the public to impact the political process, much like more conventional forms of participation. It is imperative to recognize the power of both conventional and unconventional forms of collective political participation. Another important component of political participation to consider is an individual’s activity within a political party.

Many individuals choose to participate in the political process through their selected political party. Legal and public policy scholar Barker (2016) defined a political party as “broad based, long-term, voluntary associations organized to pursue common policy goals by electing their candidates to office” (p. 290). Using this definition, it can be inferred that in order for a political party to be successful, it needs the active participation of its members. What does participation in a party look like? In parties, how members

participate can vary from party to party, and from region to region. According to political scientist Faucher (2015), in the past, unfortunately, “participation was often restricted to a two-way communication with the leadership (ballots, consultations and newsletters) with few opportunities to socialize with others” (p. 407). This form of participation is not ideal; there are few opportunities for the general members of the party to actually participate in a meaningful way. However, in recent years political parties have allowed for more participation from its members. Some of these activities include face-to-face meetings at campaign events (Gerber & Green, 2000), volunteer phone-banking (Nickerson, 2006), and simply getting members to volunteer to do things like canvassing or door-to-door campaigning. Party participation is one way many citizens choose to engage in the political process. When researching political participation, it is vital to understand the wide variety of ways that people choose to contribute to the electoral process, whether that be voting, attending a rally, or being an active member in their local party.

### **Rationale and Research Questions**

Research on Greek Life has generally revolved around the negative effects like binge drinking, partying, and sexual assault (Ward, Galante, Trivedi, & Kahrs, 2015; Brown-Rice, Furr, & Jorgensen, 2015; DeBard, Lake, & Binder, 2006). Additionally, some research has focused on certain positive effects like increased community service and career development (Asel, Seifert, & Pascarella, 2009; McClain, Sampson, Lenz, & Reardon, 2015) as well as on civic participation of those in Greek Letter Societies (Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995). These are important areas of study, to be sure, but it is striking to find how little research has been done on the political participation of those

in Greek Letter Societies. While it may seem obvious that those in organizations that have a great deal of social politics at work are more likely to participate in national, state, and local politics, it is necessary to find out if this is actually the case. Many of these students in Greek Letter Societies become political and social leaders (Walker, Martin, & Hussey, 2014) so it is logical to think there may be many more former members of fraternities/sororities who are perhaps not politicians but are still politically active. This may be due, in part, to the creation of social capital in the Greek Letter Society. One way to measure is through Interaction Involvement. While no previous research has been done on the connection of Interaction Involvement and social capital, it is reasonable to believe there is a strong relationship between the two. Clearly there is a need to research this connection between involvement in a Greek Letter Society and political participation. In addition, the relationship between Interaction Involvement and involvement in a Greek Letter Society should be examined as well. To study these relationships the research questions for this study ask:

**RQ1:** Is there a relationship between involvement in Greek Letter Societies and Interaction Involvement?

**RQ2:** Is there a relationship between Interaction Involvement and Political Participation?

**RQ3:** Is there a relationship between involvement in Greek Letter Societies and Political Participation?

CHAPTER II  
METHODOLOGY

**Participants**

Participants in this study comprised entirely of university students from a Southern mid-sized faith based university. While this school does not have chapters of any national fraternities, the local fraternities act and behave in similar fashions to those larger fraternities. Tables 1-5 lay out the descriptive statistics of the participants. Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics for gender. Four-hundred and ninety-seven students took the survey over a one week period. Of these students, 374 identified as female (75.3%), 121 as male (24.3%), and two preferred not to say (.4%), demonstrated in Table 1.

Table 1

*Descriptives - Sex*

Gender	N	Valid Percent
Female	374	75.3
Male	121	24.3
Prefer not to say	2	.4
Total	497	100

Table 2 displays the racial makeup of the participants. Two identified as American Indian (.4%), 7 as Asian (1.4%), 34 as Black or African American (6.8%), 42 As Hispanic/Latino (8.5%), 24 as Mixed race/multiracial (4.8%), 368 as Non-Hispanic White (74%), 13 as Other (2.6%), and seven preferred not to answer (1.4%).

Table 2

*Descriptives – Race*

Race	N	Valid Percent
American Indian	2	.4
Asian	7	1.4
Black or African	34	6.8
Hispanic/Latino	42	8.5
Mixed Race/Multiracial	24	4.8
Non-Hispanic White	368	74
Other	13	2.6
Prefer not to answer	7	1.4
Total	497	100

Table 3 displays the self-identified socioeconomic status (SES) of the participants. Eleven of the participants identified as Lower Class (2.2%), 362 as Middle Class (72.8%), 50 as Upper Class (10.1%), and 74 as Working Class (14.9%).

Table 3

*Descriptives – Self Identified SES*

SES	N	Valid Percent
Lower Class	11	2.2
Working Class	74	14.9
Middle Class	362	72.8
Upper Class	50	10.1
Total	497	

Table 4 displays the classifications of the participants. Seventy-nine of the participants were classified as Freshmen (15.9%), 118 as Sophomores (23.7%), 144 as Juniors (29%), and 156 as Seniors (31.4%).

Table 4

*Descriptives - Classification*

Classification	N	Valid Percent
Freshman	79	15.9
Sophomore	118	23.7
Junior	144	29.0
Senior	156	31.4
Total	497	100

Table 5 displays the membership in a local fraternity or sorority of the participants. Two-hundred and forty of the participants were not in a local fraternity/sorority (48.3%), while 257 were in a local fraternity or sorority (51.7%).

Table 5

*Descriptives – GLS Membership*

Membership	N	Valid Percent
Not a member	240	48.3
Member	257	51.7
Total	497	100

## Measures

Interaction Involvement was measured using the Interaction Involvement Scale (IIS). This scale, created by Cegala (1981), is an 18 item scale that measures the extent to which one is “aware of his or her own thoughts/feelings about messages from others, as

well as attending to the likely meanings other people intend for their messages” (Cegala, 1981, p. 525). For this study, a short form 9 item scale was used on the actual survey. This was to decrease the length of the survey in an effort to increase the number of responses.

The second scale used measures political participation. First used by Hamilton and Fauri (2001), this 8 item scale measures the voting behaviors of the participant (“I voted in the 2016 general election”, “I have voted in previous elections”) as well as how often the participant discusses politics with friends and family, if they have participated in demonstrations, made financial contributions to political causes, contacted an elected official, volunteered in a campaign, or testified before some sort of legislative body.

Finally, GLS participation was measured in one item. The one off question asked participants to self-identify their GLS participation level as not in a GLS, not active in a GLS (but still a member), active 1-2 hours a week, 2-4 hours a week, over 5 hours a week.

### **Procedures and Analysis**

For this study, a 23 question survey was emailed to students at a mid-sized, private, faith based university. The results of the survey were collected over a one week period. After collection, the data was then analyzed using SPSS. Tests ran on the data included an independent samples t-Test, One Way ANOVA, and nonparametric tests of correlation.

## CHAPTER III

### RESULTS

#### **Scale Reliability**

The 9-item Interaction Involvement Scale had acceptable internal reliability (Cronbach alpha = .53). However, removing three of the items improved the internal reliability (Cronbach alpha = .75). Additionally, while the creator of the scale (Cegala, 1981) found it to have a higher reliability, with a Cronbach alpha greater than .80, subsequent studies found the reliability of the scale to be anywhere from .55 to .80. With this information, it can be reasonably inferred that the 9-item scale used for this study is sufficiently reliable.

#### **Interaction Involvement Based on GLS Participation**

The Interaction Involvement Scale was first evaluated to discover any differences between the mean scores. Both membership in a GLS and overall participation in a GLS were analyzed. Table 6 shows the difference in means for members and non-members of a GLS. There was a significant difference ( $p = .000$ ) for means for interaction involvement between members and non-members; members of a GLS scored lower ( $M = 13.7$ ) than non-members ( $M = 15.3$ ), indicating that non-members have a higher level of interaction involvement than members.



Table 6

*Independent Samples t-Test of IIS and GLS Membership*

Membership	Mean	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	Significance
Member	15.32	4.644	495	.000
Non-member	13.72			

Table 7 shows an analysis of variance for IIS and levels of participation in a GLS. These levels are categorized as not in a GLS, not active, active 1-2 hours/week, active 2-4 hours/week, and active 5 or more hours/week. There was a significant difference between the groups ( $p = .000$ ).

Table 7

*One-Way ANOVA of IIS and GLS Participation*

	Sum of Squares	<i>df</i>	Mean Square	<i>F</i>	Sig.
Between Groups	461.216	4	115.304	7.878	.000
Within Groups	7201.033	492	14.636		
Total	7662.249	496			

Tables 8 and 9 demonstrate the means differences between each level of activity with a GLS and the post-hoc analysis for the difference in means based on participation (measured in time spent) in a GLS. Those who were not in a GLS scored highest on the IIS ( $M = 15.33$ ), followed those not active, but were members, of a GLS ( $M = 15.14$ ), those who spent 1-2 hours a week in activities with their GLS ( $M = 14.03$ ), those who spent 5 or more hours a week ( $M = 13.21$ ), and those who spent 2-4 hours a week ( $M =$

13.04), with the higher score meaning a higher level of interaction involvement. There were significant differences between all those categories of participants active at least one hour a week and those who were either not active or not in a GLS.

Table 8

*Differences in Mean IIS score based on GLS Participation*

Time Spent with GLS	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
1-2 hours a week	14.03	3.74304	88
2-4 hours a week	13.04	3.32843	101
More than 5 hours a week	13.21	3.64496	28
Not active	15.14	4.12944	42
Not in a GLS	15.33	4.01287	238
Total	14.4990	3.93041	497

Table 9

*Post-Hoc LSD Analysis of IIS Score and GLS Participation*

Time Spent With GLS	Time Spent With GLS	Mean Difference	Sig.
	2-4 hours a week	.99449	.075
1-2 hours a week	More than 5 hours a week	.81981	.324
	Not active	-1.10877	.123
	Not in a GLS	-1.29364	.007
	1-2 hours a week	-.99449	.075
2-4 hours a week	More than 5 hours a week	-.17468	.831
	Not active	-2.10325	.003
	Not in a GLS	-2.28813	.000
	1-2 hours a week	-.81981	.324
More than 5 hours a week	2-4 hours a week	.17468	.831
	Not active	-1.92857	.039
	Not in a GLS	-2.11345	.006
	1-2 hours a week	1.10877	.123
Not active	2-4 hours a week	2.10325	.003
	More than 5 hours a week	1.92857	.039
	Not in a GLS	-.18487	.773
	1-2 hours a week	1.29364	.007
Not in a GLS	2-4 hours a week	2.28813	.000
	More than 5 hours a week	2.11345	.006
	Not active	.18487	.773

**Interaction Involvement Based on Gender**

Table 10 shows the difference in mean total scores for the IIS based on gender. Males scored lower ( $M = 13.87$ ) on the IIS than Females ( $M = 14.71$ ), meaning females have a higher level of interaction involvement. These differences were statistically significant ( $p = .042$ ).

Table 10

*Independent Samples t-Test of total IIS Score and Gender*

Gender	Mean	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	Significance
Female	14.71	2.043	493	.042
Male	13.87			

**GLS Participation/Membership and Political Participation**

Tables 11 and 12 show the difference in mean political participation for those in a GLS, and those are not members, as well as the differences based on level of participation in the GLS. Those not in a GLS scored lower ( $M = 13.85$ ) than those who were members of a GLS ( $M = 13.97$ ), indicating a higher level of involvement for those not in a GLS. However, that difference was not significant ( $p = .218$ ).

Table 11

*Independent Samples t-Test GLS Membership and Political Participation*

Membership in GLS	Mean	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	Significance
No	13.85	-1.23	495	.218
Yes	13.97			

Table 12 shows an analysis of variance for political participation and participation in a GLS (groups categorized as previously mentioned). There was no significant difference between the groups ( $p = .700$ ).

Table 12

*One-Way ANOVA of Political Participation and GLS Participation*

	Sum of Squares	<i>df</i>	Mean Square	<i>F</i>	Sig.
Between Groups	2.709	4	.677	.549	.700
Within Groups	606.570	492	1.233		
Total	609.280	496			

**Race and Political Participation**

Table 13 shows the analysis of variance for political participation by race. There was no significant difference between the groups ( $p = .590$ ).

Table 13

*One-Way ANOVA for Race and Political Participation*

	Sum of Squares	<i>df</i>	Mean Square	<i>F</i>	Sig.
Between Groups	6.869	7	.981	.797	.590
Within Groups	602.411	489	1.232		
Total	609.280	496			

### Socioeconomic Status and Political Participation

Table 14 shows the analysis of variance for Political Participation by SES. There was no significant difference ( $p = .593$ ).

Table 14

*One-Way ANOVA for Political Participation and SES*

	Sum of Squares	<i>df</i>	Mean Square	<i>F</i>	Sig.
Between Groups	2.344	3	.781	.635	.593
Within Groups	606.936	493	1.231		
Total	609.280	496			

### Gender and Political Participation

Table 15 shows the difference in means in political participation for gender. Females tended to score slightly higher ( $M = 13.91$ ) than Males ( $M = 13.90$ ), though the difference was both small and insignificant ( $p = .889$ ).

Table 15

*Independent Samples t-Test for Political Participation and Gender*

Gender	Mean	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	Significance
Female	13.91	.140	493	.889
Male	13.90			

### Classification and Political Participation

Table 16 shows an analysis of variance for political participation by classification. There was a significant difference between the groups ( $p = .037$ ). There was a significant difference between freshmen and sophomores ( $p = .012$ ), and between sophomores and juniors ( $p = .013$ ). Tables 17 shows post hoc analysis of classification and political participation. Freshmen scored the lowest ( $M = 13.75$ ), followed by Juniors ( $M = 13.81$ ), Seniors ( $M = 13.91$ ), and Sophomores ( $M = 14.15$ ).

Table 16

#### *One-Way ANOVA for Political Participation by Classification*

	Sum of Squares	<i>df</i>	Mean Square	<i>F</i>	Sig.
Between Groups	10.408	3	3.469	2.856	.037
Within Groups	598.872	493	1.215		
Total	609.280	496			

Table 17

#### *LSD Post-Hoc descriptives of PP by Classification*

What is your classification?	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Freshman	13.75 <sup>a</sup>	1.13757	79
Sophomore	14.15 <sup>a b</sup>	1.02638	144
Junior	13.81 <sup>b</sup>	1.11549	156
Senior	13.91	1.12664	118
Total	13.91	1.10833	497

Same superscripts are significantly different.

### Relationship between Political Participation and Interaction Involvement

Table 18 demonstrates the relationship between political participation and interaction involvement. According to both Kendall's tau-b ( $p = .030$ ) and Spearman rho ( $p = .032$ ) there was a significant correlation between the two.

Table 18

#### *Correlation between Political Participation and Interaction Involvement*

		VStotal	IISTotal
Kendall's tau_b	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.074
	VStotal	Sig. (2-tailed)	.
	N	497	497
	IISTotal2	Correlation Coefficient	.074
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.030	.
	N	497	497
Spearman's rho	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.094
	VStotal	Sig. (2-tailed)	.
	N	497	497
	IISTotal2	Correlation Coefficient	.094
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.037	.
	N	497	497



## CHAPTER IV

### DISCUSSION

#### **Interaction Involvement and GLS Participation**

The results of this study seem to indicate several things. In regard to II and GLS participation/membership, it seems that those in a GLS show lower levels of II in comparison to those not in in GLS. Why is this interesting? First, from an anecdotal perspective, one might think that those in a GLS would demonstrate higher levels of II. Often times these individuals are connected, involved on campus, and place a high priority on making friends, hence the involvement in a GLS. Are these mistaken assumptions, though? Perhaps that line of thinking is incorrect.

One possible explanation is that those in a GLS segregate themselves from the rest of campus. Meaning, while those in a GLS may be highly active in their own social circle, the GLS itself, but less engaged in other social situation. At the same time, those not in a GLS may have an easier time branching out to a diverse range of people in social groups across campus. In this scenario, the non GLS-member would demonstrate a higher level of involvement due to their ability to interact with more than one group of people. As one encounters more and more people, their ability to interact goes up, leading to a higher level of involvement. Another argument would be that those not in a GLS are forced to have a higher level of II. Due to a lack of a defined social circle, in the form of the GLS, these individuals must improve their level of interaction involvement on order to make friends and other social acquaintances. These are similar arguments, and are somewhat of a “chicken or the egg” argument. Are non-members more involved because

they have to be in order to branch out and make friends? Or does their ability to branch out and make friends lead to a higher level of involvement? These arguments would explain the lower levels of interaction involvement in GLS members, but without measuring involvement in other areas of campus it is difficult to ascertain the truth of the arguments. Whatever the reason, those in a GLS displaying lower levels of interaction involvement has some potential implications.

A major criticism of GLS, and those in a GLS, is the lack of attachment with reality. There is a prominent stereotype among those in a GLS of being “frat” or “srat”, stereotypes that are often times not shared or approved of by the public at large. These stereotypes, assuming they are true, may be due to the members of a GLS being detached from social norms, as a result of their low levels of interaction involvement. Additionally, the exclusivity aspect often seen in a GLS may be a result of the low levels of interaction involvement, or vice versa; the low level of interaction involvement leads to an exclusive group unable to recruit different types of people. Giving credence to this idea, higher education scholars Hevel, Martin, Weeden, and Pascarella (2015) found that “fraternity/sorority membership had a significant negative influence on White students’ critical thinking” (p. 466). While this study’s results were directly related to White students involved in a GLS, it is reasonable to suspect that a GLS can have an influence on things like critical thinking and interaction involvement. It is possible, then, that participating in a GLS can decrease one’s interaction involvement, or that those participating in a GLS are those with preexisting lower levels of interaction involvement. There must be some way that interaction involvement and social capital work in a GLS.

Even though those in a GLS show lower levels of interaction involvement, there is still different explanations for how that impacts their level of social capital. As mentioned throughout this study, interaction involvement is used to measure social capital. Does this mean that those in a GLS have lower levels of social capital? Obviously the result of this study indicate that would be the case; there is a clear and significant difference between the groups which would indicate that a lack of a single, powerful social group forces those not in a GLS, or who are not very involved, to seek avenues of social capital elsewhere. By branching out, these individuals who are not highly involved in the GLS may be unintentionally creating more social capital for themselves by interacting with a wide and diverse group of people. This does seem to make sense; rather than being connected to a largely homogeneous social system in the GLS, these non-members, or perhaps those who are not very involved, end up connecting to several different heterogeneous groups of students. On the other hand, it is still possible that those in a GLS do in fact have a higher level of social capital, but because it is within a homogenous group, the interaction involvement necessary for those connections is low. For example, if one individual has 45 close connections in a GLS they may have a high level of social capital, but could potentially score low on the IIS due to only interacting with one, homogenous group. At the same time a different individual with 20 close connections across several diverse groups may have a lower level of social capital but demonstrate higher levels of interaction involvement due to their ability to interact with many kinds of people. A further explanation is that two different kinds of social capital could be at play.

The difference between bonding and bridging social capital could be one explanation for the difference in levels of interaction involvement between the categories of GLS participation. Bonding, the type of social capital that increases the unity of one group, could be very high among those in a GLS. The various activities and functions put on by the GLS could increase bonding social capital while doing nothing to promote bridging capital. Bridging is social capital that facilitates meeting people across different social contexts, which is perhaps where the non-members, or non-involved members, gain their social capital. It is possible that those highly involved in a GLS demonstrate high levels of bonding capital, but lower overall levels of social capital, as measured by the IIS. Any of these explanations are valid, and all could even be true for different people. If there is a potential relationship between GLS participation and social capital, what about GLS participation and political participation?

### **GLS Participation and Political Participation**

This study found no significant difference between GLS participation/membership and political participation. It seems that university students are all somewhat similar in their ability or desire to vote, participate in rallies, contact elected officials, etc. Part of the issue, to be discussed later, is that many of these students may not have had an opportunity to partake in some of the activities measured in the scale. Either way, for activities students in this study could easily participate in the level of participation was still low. So while there was no significant difference between the groups, all groups were inactive. Why would there be no difference between the groups?

One major possibility for the lack of significant difference between the varying levels of GLS participation and political participation is that those in a GLS may be

motivated to participate in intra-organizational activities but not any more so motivated to be politically activated relative to other college students. This goes back to the idea that university students are equally inactive politically; so here, the argument is that participating in a GLS does not promote nor discourage any further political participation. Simply taking part in GLS activities does not make one any more or less politically active, and those in in a GLS are not any more or less inclined to be politically active than the rest of their peers. Though there is no significant difference between GLS and political participation, there was a small correlation between political participation and interaction involvement.

### **Interaction Involvement and Political Participation**

This study did find a slight, but significant, correlation between interaction involvement and political participation. It seems that the higher the level of interaction involvement, the higher the level of political participation. This is in line with the idea that higher levels of social capital, in this study measured through the IIS, lead to higher political involvement. This is the main idea behind this study. Social capital, measured by the IIS, should be connected to how people participate in politics. As mentioned in the literature review, there is a great deal of research into why this is, and for college students, it appears that the link between social capital and political participation happens for similar reasons.

The first probable reason for the correlation between social capital and political participation is similar to everyone else; the more connected you are to the world around you the more you vote and partake in other political activities. This would make sense on a college campus, as they are large, close knit societies. It is not difficult for university

students to create large social networks, regardless of GLS participation. So there is no lack of social capital being created on campus. Even though that social capital does not seem to translate to higher levels of voting and other political participation, relative to the American public at large, there is still a positive correlation between social capital and political participation.

Another possible explanation for the social capital/political participation correlation is that the more politically oriented students on campus are those who already want a large social network. For instance, someone who is well connected to political issues may also be more inclined to care about running for a student government position. In order to be elected to a student government position, an individual must meet with and be involved in many different groups and social networks on campus. Many, if not most, student government and other campus organization presidents and officers are involved elsewhere on campus, leading to the creation of more social capital. These individuals, who are already more politically involved, are probably going to develop more social capital than their peers throughout their time in college. To be sure, this does not mean this is always true. With the small correlation found, there are many people who are highly politically active, but with little social capital, and others who have robust social networks, but lack any desire to be involved with politics at any level. Both of these types of individuals are probably fairly common across university campuses. The correlation found between interaction involvement and political participation simply indicates that in general, there is a small relationship between the two. While this is not an incredibly strong correlation, it is still noteworthy for the purposes of this study. It is also possible that the weak correlation is due to a lack of political participation across the board.

As shown in this study, university students are not very politically active. This is not new or groundbreaking research, in American culture it is basically common knowledge that young people (especially those still in school) do not take part in political activities nearly as often as older populations. While many in this study did vote in the 2016 presidential election (around 50%), outside of that most participated in few political activities. This did not vary much regardless of GLS participation, race, classification, gender, or SES. This could impact the correlation between interaction involvement and political participation. Perhaps if there were greater levels of political participation among the participants, a stronger correlation would have been found.

### **Classification and Political Participation**

Interestingly, this study found a significant difference between classifications in regards to political participation. There was a significant difference and a change in level of participation from freshmen to sophomores and from sophomores to juniors. This would indicate that political participation changes every year, until the last two years. There are a few potential reasons for this. The first is the structure of student life at the university where the study took place. Freshmen and sophomores must live on campus, but juniors and seniors live off campus. For reasons unknown, perhaps this somehow contributes to the differences. The change in type of living experience, from communal residence hall (freshman year) to a private residence hall (sophomore year) to a private house/apartment (junior year) may somehow play into the political development of a student. In addition to the living experiences, the rush processes in each GLS take on a similar pattern. Freshmen do not rush/pledge, sophomores rush/pledge, and juniors/seniors are in charge of the rushes and pledging events. Again, maybe this process

plays a small role in the significant differences between the groups. A different reason for this significant difference could be that individuals mature in their political participation every year throughout their teens, and by the time they reach the ages of 20-22 they do not mature or grow as quickly in this area. Generally, by the time a student is a junior or senior they are at least 20 years of age. There is no strong evidence to support these claims, but maybe they are worth studying.

### **Gender and Interaction Involvement**

A final interesting finding of the study was the significant difference in the levels of interaction involvement for males and females. In the study, females demonstrated higher levels of interaction involvement than men. While the difference was not very large, less than one point on a scale ranging from nine to forty-five points, it was still significant. This indicates that females are perhaps slightly better communicators than males, as measured by the IIS.

### **Limitations/Future Research**

There were several limitations for this study. The first limitation was the sample size. While the number of participants in the study was high, they were all from one university. Additionally, the university is a small, private, Christian school in a somewhat rural area. This potentially limited the diversity of the responses received, especially in regards to the political participation scale. A future study may find different results with a larger sample size that utilizes several different universities varying in size, type, and location.

A second limitation was the IIS used for this study. While the nine-item scale used accurately portrayed the three categories of the IIS (attentiveness, responsiveness,



and perceptiveness) the scale was still only half of the original 18-item scale. A futures study would do well to include the entire scale, rather than just a shorthand form of it.

As mentioned earlier the political participation scale may have had difficulty accurately measuring college students. Measuring certain areas like voting are fine in a rural area, but many students probably have never had the opportunity to attend something like a rally or protest. So even though some students would score higher on this scale if they were living in a larger city, that did not show up on the scale. As a result, the levels of political participation were potentially lower and there was not as diverse a set of answers to the survey questions as there might be had the survey been given to students in a larger city. A future study may find it easier to use this scale on students in more urban environments. Additionally, this scale only measures actual participation. Someone who has a passion for politics and is more informed than their peers could still score lower than those same, less informed individuals. The goal of this study was to research participation itself, so this may not necessarily be a limitation, but a future study could include questions that measure other related areas.

One of the biggest limitations of this study is whether or not interaction involvement accurately measures social capital. It is the belief of the researcher that it does, but there is perhaps a better way of measuring social capital from a communication perspective. Does how well someone communicates with another individual actually connect to social capital? That seems logical, but there is no definite way of knowing that. One major point of concern is as far as the IIS measuring social capital goes, is that those who are generally in power in the U.S. (i.e wealthy, white, well-connected males) did not score higher than other groups. One might think that the dominant group in U.S.

culture would possess higher levels of social capital, and therefore score higher on the IIS. This could be pointing to a limitation of the scale. A future study could either find a way to prove the connection between interaction involvement and social capital, or find a different scale that does more accurately capture the idea of social capital.

### **Conclusion**

Why people participate in local, state, or national politics is an incredibly important field of research, and anything that contributes to that is worthwhile. This study did find that political participation and interaction involvement are correlated. Whether it is a politician finding a way to get someone's vote, or a political communication scholar researching who is more likely to vote, this relationship is an important one.

While this study found no statistical significance between GLS participation and political participation, that relationship is still potentially important. Universities, and all those working in higher education, need to better understand their own student populations and groups on campus. Many members of fraternities/sororities/social clubs become not only campus leaders but also economic, political, and social leaders of the nation years later. It is important to study this population in an attempt to learn more about how communication plays a role in the fabric of American society.

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## APPENDIX A

### IRB Approval Letter

**ABILENE CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY**  
*Educating Students for Christian Service and Leadership Throughout the World*  
Office of Research and Sponsored Programs  
320 Hardin Administration Building, ACU Box 29103, Abilene, Texas 79699-9103  
325-674-2885



2/14/2017  
Philip Lamborn  
Department of Communication  
ACU Box 28058  
Abilene Christian University

Dear Mr. Lamborn:

On behalf of the Institutional Review Board, I am pleased to inform you that your project titled

(IRB#17-012 ) is exempt from review under Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects (45 CFR 46.101(b)(2)).

If at any time the details of this project change, please resubmit to the IRB so the committee can determine whether or not the exempt status is still applicable.

I wish you well with your work.

Sincerely,

*Megan Roth*

Megan Roth, Ph.D.  
Director of Research and Sponsored Programs

## APPENDIX B

### Participant Survey

You may be eligible to take part in a research study. This form provides important information about that study, including the risks and benefits to you, the potential participant. Please read this form carefully and ask any questions that you may have regarding the procedures, your involvement, and any risks or benefits you may experience. You may also wish to discuss your participation with other people, such as your family doctor or a family member.

Also, please note that your participation is entirely voluntary. You may decline to participate or withdraw from the study at any time and for any reason without any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Please contact the Principal Investigator if you have any questions or concerns regarding this study or if at any time you wish to withdraw. This contact information may be found at the end of this form.

Purpose of the Research—To study the relationship between activity in a social club/local fraternity/sorority and political participation (eg. Voting, contacting legislators, etc.).

The procedure involves filling an online survey that will take approximately 10-15 minutes.

There are risks to taking part in this research study. The only foreseeable risk is that your email address would be acquired by an outside source. However, your email address and response to this survey will be kept in a password protected file that only the principal investigator will have access to. Your information and responses will be kept completely confidential. The researchers have taken steps to minimize the risks associated with this study. However, if you experience any problems, you may contact Philip Lamborn at [psl10a@acu.edu](mailto:psl10a@acu.edu)

There are potential benefits to participating in this study. Such benefits may include access to a summary of the results of this study upon request. The researchers cannot guarantee that you will experience any personal benefits from participating in this study. However, the researchers hope that the information learned from this study will help others in similar situations in the future.

Information collected about you will be handled in a confidential manner in accordance with the law. Some identifiable data may have to be shared with individuals outside of

the study team, such as members of the ACU Institutional Review Board. Aside from these required disclosures, your confidentiality will be protected by privately storing your responses as mentioned above.

You may ask any questions that you have at this time. However, if you have additional questions, concerns, or complaints in the future, you may contact the Principal Investigator of this study. The Principal Investigator is Philip Lamborn and may be contacted at [psl10a@acu.edu](mailto:psl10a@acu.edu)

If you are unable to reach the Principal Investigator or wish to speak to someone other than the Principal Investigator, you may contact Cindy Roper at [roperc@acu.edu](mailto:roperc@acu.edu)

If you have concerns about this study or general questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact ACU's Chair of the Institutional Review Board and Director of the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs, Megan Roth, Ph.D. Dr. Roth may be reached at

(325) 674-2885

[megan.roth@acu.edu](mailto:megan.roth@acu.edu)

320 Hardin Administration Bldg, ACU Box 29103

Abilene, TX 79699

1. What is your email address?
2. What is your gender?
  - a. Male
  - b. Female
  - c. Other
3. What is your classification?
  - a. Freshman
  - b. Sophomore
  - c. Juinor
  - d. Senior
4. Ethnicity origin (or Race): Please specify your ethnicity.
  - a. White
  - b. Hispanic or Latino
  - c. Black or African American
  - d. Native American or American Indian
  - e. Asian / Pacific Islander
  - f. Other
5. Are you a member of a social club or fraternity/sorority?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
6. How much time do you spend in activities with your social club/fraternity/sorority?
  - a. More than 5 hours a week
  - b. 2-4 hours a week
  - c. 1-2 hours a week

- d. Not Active
  - e. Not in a social club/fraternity/sorority
7. Often in conversations, I'm not sure what my role is; that is, I'm not sure how I'm expected to relate to others.
- a. Strongly Disagree
  - b. Disagree
  - c. Neither
  - d. Agree
  - e. Strongly Agree
8. Often in conversations I'm not sure what the other is really saying.
- a. Strongly Disagree
  - b. Disagree
  - c. Neither
  - d. Agree
  - e. Strongly Agree
9. Often I feel sort of "unplugged" from the social situation of which I am part; that is, I'm uncertain of my role, others' motives, and what's happening.
- a. Strongly Agree
  - b. Agree
  - c. Neither
  - d. Disagree
  - e. Strongly Disagree
10. I am keenly aware of how others perceive me during my conversations.
- a. Strongly Agree
  - b. Agree
  - c. Neither
  - d. Disagree
  - e. Strongly Disagree
11. During conversations, I am sensitive to others' subtle or hidden meanings.
- a. Strongly Disagree
  - b. Disagree
  - c. Neither
  - d. Agree
  - e. Strongly Agree
12. I am very observant during my conversation with others.
- a. Strongly Disagree
  - b. Disagree
  - c. Neither
  - d. Agree
  - e. Strongly Agree
13. My mind wanders during conversations and I often miss parts of what is going on.
- a. Strongly Disagree
  - b. Disagree
  - c. Neither
  - d. Agree
  - e. Strongly Agree

14. Often I will pretend to be listening to someone when in fact I'm thinking about something else.
  - a. Strongly Agree
  - b. Agree
  - c. Neither
  - d. Disagree
  - e. Strongly Disagree
15. Often I am preoccupied in my conversations and do not pay complete attention to others.
  - a. Strongly Disagree
  - b. Disagree
  - c. Neither
  - d. Agree
  - e. Strongly Agree
16. I voted in the 2016 Presidential Election
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
17. I have contacted a government/political official by letter/phone/email
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
18. I have discussed politics with family/friends/peers
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
19. I have made a financial contribution to a candidate/party/campaign
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
20. I have participated in a protest/march/demonstration
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
21. I have contacted an official in person
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
22. I have volunteered in a campaign
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
23. I have testified or spoken before a legislative body
  - a. Yes
  - b. No