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# Editor's Note

Welcome to the inaugural issue of *Peer Review: The Undergraduate Research Journal of the Ethnography of the University Initiative* at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC).

The Ethnography of the University Initiative (EUI) promotes student research on universities and colleges as complex institutions. Based at the University of Illinois, EUI supports faculty from various disciplinary and methodological backgrounds to integrate original student research on universities and colleges into their courses through faculty development workshops, customized web environments, Institutional Review Board permissions, and bi-annual student conferences. In EUI-affiliated courses, students use a variety of ethnographic, archival, and related methods to examine the university in the broader context of our social and political times. At the end of each semester, students have the opportunity to contribute their work to the EUI collection in the U of I's digital repository, Illinois Digital Environment for Access to Learning and Scholarship (IDEALS). Now, as we launch our journal, students have a new outlet to highlight their work.

I want to thank Karen Rodriguez'G for her vision and professional leadership in the development of this journal. Her commitment to facilitating student growth, through research, is unmatched and an incredible asset to both her students and this journal. Thank you to our Advisory Board (Dr. Nancy Abelmann, Merinda Hensley, and Karen Rodriguez'G). I would also like to thank Merinda Hensley for all of her technical support in developing and launching this open access journal as well as Elizabeth Morely in the Writing Center for her wisdom and training of our editors. Publishing work is one of the most rewarding experiences for those involved in academic ventures but ensuring that one's work is available to the masses is evermore gratifying. Open access platforms afford authors the opportunity to share their work with the world, sans, the typical barriers of traditional publishing.

I also want to thank our managing editors (Marc Chua, Katrina Halfaker, Victoria Machen, Hannah Park, and Alanna Smart) for their tireless work in promoting the journal's call for papers and overseeing the editing process.

Our inaugural issue features two peer-reviewed articles, one multi-media project, and a reflection from a EUI faculty member. Margaret O'Connor examines accessibility issues at sororities and highlights the limitations of temporary accessibility accommodations typically made during recruitment. Cecilia Montesdeoca, student at Illinois State University (ISU), examines ISU's student health agenda and suggests that despite links between student health and academics, student health is taken for granted. In their multi-media project, Shaunette Smith, Fatima Diabate, and Ariella Cohen explore the experiences of LGBTQ students as they engage in different social spaces across campus. And finally, Dr. Siobhan Somerville, an associate professor at UIUC, reflects on her experiences teaching EUI courses.

I hope that you enjoy our inaugural issue of *Peer Review*.

T. Jameson Brewer
Senior Editor

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# Wheelchair Ride to Panhellenic Pride: Ramps, Recruitment, and Reaching Full Accessibility to Sororities

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**Abstract**

*With 18 sororities that participate in formal recruitment at the University of Illinois, Panhellenic Council seeks to promote full inclusion and "mutual understanding" among all women who decide that they want to become a part of the Greek system. For women in wheelchairs or motor chairs, Panhellenic Council facilitates the accommodations necessary to allow the potential new member to visit every house. Research methods were focused heavily on personal interviews but also include a survey of sorority chapter presidents, archival research, Panhellenic Council's governing documents at the University of Illinois, and research on student publications. Interviews reveal the perspective of the women serving on Panhellenic Council, a woman with a physical disability who is an active member of a Panhellenic Council sorority and a woman with a physical disability who chose not to participate in formal Panhellenic recruitment. The final paper explores the limitations of the temporary accessibility that is only required for formal recruitment and how this may deter or promote participation in sorority life for women in wheelchairs. It also explains the connection between physical and social accessibility and how this relationship impacts active membership after formal recruitment. Ultimately, it highlights the ways in which the Panhellenic community is working toward but still has yet to reach mutual understanding of what "accessibility" means between able-bodied sorority members and women with disabilities.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Panhellenic Pride. These two words, aside from their alliterative harmony, signify unity within the Greek System and respect toward the core values that Panhellenic sororities have in common. Panhellenic Council, or the "inter-sorority programming and governing body" at the University of Illinois - Urbana-Champaign, "...is constantly at work to make sure every woman is treated with the absolute respect and mutual understanding of her peers" ("Greek Terms" n.d.). When it comes to formal recruitment, there is an understanding between able-bodied women of the necessity of encouraging every woman to participate, even if that means constructing a temporary ramp to accommodate students using wheelchairs. During past recruitments when women in wheelchairs have participated, Panhellenic Council has ensured that every house is accessible, at least in its entryway—and that is something to be celebrated. However, the "mutual" aspect of this understanding has yet to be achieved. There exists a disconnect between the well-intentioned efforts to put up temporary ramps and the harsher reality of sorority accessibility for women in wheelchairs both during and after recruitment. While sororities have willingly complied and cooperated with Panhellenic Council when asked, there are no members who are a part of the recruitment planning process who are in wheelchairs; thus many of the social accommodations that women in wheelchairs would like to see have yet to be made. As University of Illinois student Rebecca (all names used are pseudonyms) indicated, you cannot just "slap a ramp on something and call it accessible." Thus the Panhellenic community has much room to develop and grow before it can truly pride itself on mutual understanding.

## II. METHODOLOGY

In order to address this question, my research needed to be current and rather abstract. Social accessibility does not typically warrant substantial quantitative data, but rather relies heavily on evaluating perceptions of the Greek System and individual experiences. Thus the

majority of my information came from interviews and my own personal knowledge of the formal recruitment process. My firsthand experience involves my participation in Panhellenic formal recruitment both as a potential new member and as an active recruiting member of a Panhellenic sorority. Because my question focused specifically on recruitment, I began with the Vice President of Recruitment, Norah Cetin, who oversaw Panhellenic Recruitment in the Fall of 2013 and the Vice President of Recruitment for Panhellenic Recruitment who directed recruitment in the Fall of 2011, Jessica Ponticelli. While Cetin was able to provide insightful information as to how the process of coordinating accommodations for women with wheelchairs runs in the beginning stages, Ponticelli supplemented that information with her own reflections on the overall experience and how it played in the Fall of 2012. I contacted both of these individuals via email and explained my research project and my intention not to place blame on the Panhellenic community but to raise awareness on an issue that would align strongly with the Panhellenic values of respect and understanding between all people regardless of race, religious affiliation, gender, sexual orientation, or disability. Cetin is someone who lived in my sorority house, so that interview took place there out of convenience, while my interview with Ponticelli took place in the Illini Union.

After speaking to both of them, it seemed as though participating in formal recruitment was something that was relatively straightforward, wheelchair or not—yet I knew that the level of participation from women in wheelchairs was still quite low, so there had to be a reason behind this disconnect. That is why I spoke to two women with disabilities, one who went through formal recruitment and one who chose not to participate. I met with Rebecca, the student who elected not to join a Panhellenic sorority, at a local sandwich shop and Carly, the woman who is currently a member of a Panhellenic sorority, in a private room in her sorority house. Both of these interviews yielded distinct but equally valuable perspectives in evaluating the state of social accessibility for women in wheelchairs. Like the interviews with Cetin and Ponticelli, these conversations were audio-recorded and transcribed post-interview.

The interviews with Carly and Rebecca were especially revealing, as I was able to understand the apprehensions they both experienced when considering joining a Panhellenic sorority. Carly's experience was one that exceeded her expectations in many ways, but I was left to wonder whether or not her positive experience was unique to the chapter she chose to join or if other houses would be equally as welcoming. So I created an anonymous survey for the Panhellenic sorority presidents and presented my research project at one of their president's council meetings in order to convince them that voluntary participation in this survey would be worth their efforts—not only because of women who might go through Panhellenic recruitment in a wheelchair, but also because alumnae, family members of women in their chapter, and members who are physically injured unexpectedly would all benefit from having an accessible house. The survey was sent out via email, and I was able to recruit 14 out of the 24 Panhellenic chapters to participate.

Further, I obtained a copy of the 2011 Recruitment Constitution and Bylaws through Cetin, and did research from the Panhellenic website, where women register for recruitment and get all of their preliminary recruitment information. Simi Linton's *My Body Politic* and Tony Greif's research paper "Access Your Letters" were additional resources that I found through class assignments and discussions, and their content pushed me a little bit further to question what I was learning through my interviews and survey.

## III. FINDINGS

Of the twenty-four Panhellenic chapters, only one has an active member in a wheelchair (Gawlik 2012). Yet according to the interviews with Cetin and Ponticelli, the steps to accommodate women with specific considerations ranging from a peanut allergy to

a wheelchair had run smoothly. In fact, Carly told Ponticelli that it had been easier to participate in formal recruitment than it was to find an accessible hotel room in Illinois. Certainly, this level of accessibility is to be commended. On the surface, it appears that Panhellenic formal recruitment is fully open to women in wheelchairs—but on one of the most wheelchair-accessible campuses in the world with one of the largest Greek Systems, 100% of the fourteen surveyed sororities had no members in wheelchairs, and there are typically only one or two out of the several hundred women who participate in recruitment that are in wheelchairs (Survey 2012).

It is also interesting to note that in none of sororities' survey responses, nor in the Panhellenic Recruitment Bylaws, are there any provisions mentioning the inclusion of women with disabilities. During past recruitments when a woman in a wheelchair indicated on her registration form that she needed special accommodations for recruitment, Panhellenic officers and their advisors would take it on a case-by-case basis rather than follow any specific guidelines. This allows the officers to evaluate each situation specifically rather than follow a blanket procedure, and it also puts a significant amount of responsibility in the hands of the potential new member (PNM) to self-advocate. Carly was more than grateful for the ramps put up, and while she insisted that any additional accommodations were easily made, they required her to recognize that she needed a recruitment group leader, or Gamma Chi[1], to go with her to each house and ensure that the ramps were usable and that she could get to each house in a timely manner. For Rebecca, this was one of her greatest apprehensions. She said that she had able-bodied friends who encouraged her to rush in the past, but she believes that they "don't understand the implications of that offer" (Rebecca interview 2012). She worries that though they mean well, the able-bodied sorority member might not consider how many other details are required to make recruitment accessible because all disabilities are different. Whatever accommodations that may have made recruitment accessible for another member in the past might prove insufficient for another woman in a wheelchair. In other words, there exists an awkward gap between what an able-bodied person and a person with a disability considers accessible.

For both Rebecca and Carly, it was not just the concern about having proper ramps in place that was daunting, but also the format of the formal recruitment process. There are eighteen chapters that participate in Panhellenic formal recruitment. During Open House round, PNMs are expected to make it to all eighteen houses within two days. Afterward, a PNM will rank her top choices of chapters and the chapter members will give her a score based on the conversations they had. The consecutive invites narrow down the amount of chapters based on mutual selection from a maximum of thirteen, then to seven, and for the final invite, three chapters ("Recruitment Events" n.d.). Especially on the days when the amount of invites are between seven and eighteen, many PNMs—disabled or not—struggle to go back and forth between sororities in Champaign and Urbana in the allotted ten minutes between the scheduled invitations. Carly and Rebecca both noted that a few extra minutes would be necessary for PNMs in wheelchairs in order for them to ensure that ramps were usable and thus this automatically separated them from the group.

Sometimes the usability of the ramps was a factor that added an additional challenge to the already stressful process. Carly noted that there were some houses that would lay down a stack of books and place a piece of plywood over it and call that a ramp; others would use a board over their steps that would be incredibly steep. Especially because Carly travels in a 300-pound motor chair, the ramps needed to be sturdy

[1] Gamma Chis are selected from undergraduate female students who are initiated members of Panhellenic chapters and have completed the Gamma Chi section of a Gender & Women Studies course. The selection process includes an application and interview.

enough to support the weight as well as have a gentle incline. In her novel *My Body Politic,* author Simi Linton describes a similar experience with a so-called accessible building when she went to the most expensive hotel in Manhattan. She found that despite how new the hotel was, its attempts to accommodate her and her motor chair were inadequate at best. According to Linton (2006), the plywood ramp "was unadorned, and, seemingly attached to the steps as an afterthought" (185). In the same way that the ramp in Linton's situation was designed for compliance reasons rather than an active effort to include her, Carly witnessed the disconnect between her actual needs and what sororities perceived as a sufficient accommodation.

Further, the efforts to remedy these less-than-perfect situations can result in a counterproductive attempt to make a PNM feel included. Indeed, Linton noted that though she was able to advocate for herself and find a doorman to help her get up the ramp, when she got to the top, "there was a flutter of activity toward me just to make sure that I got into the elevator safely. They were well-intentioned, but were blocking my path" (Linton 2006, 185). Linton became frustrated with the excess attention given to her because it hindered her ability to access the building rather than achieving its intended helpful effect. During recruitment, Carly found that her Gamma Chis would also become "angry and defensive" with the chapter if their ramp was not constructed properly. After all, the sororities knew that they needed to rent or construct a ramp months in advance of formal recruitment, according to Ponticelli. Carly, though she was not frustrated with the situation like Linton, also considered the fuss unnecessary but was grateful to see the Gamma Chis "bending over backwards" to make sure that she could access the houses. In many ways, it was more the idea that sororities were taking action that made Carly feel welcome than the actual ramp itself. It is possible, however, for PNMs to become frustrated like Simi Linton and find the extra effort they need to even enter the chapter house to be alienating and/or an even greater obstacle to being fully integrated into sorority life.

Nonetheless, when a PNM in a wheelchair finally enters the house during recruitment, the Panhellenic community takes steps to equalize the chapters and the PNMs and ensure that preferences are formed on the basis of conversation rather than on superficial factors like appearance. For example, said Ponticelli, during the Open House round, all sororities are wearing the same t-shirt and all PNMs wear matching PNM t-shirts and carry matching canvas bags. Further, if a PNM in a wheelchair needs to use a side or a back entrance or cannot reach the second floor for conversations, the PNMs must all use that same entrance and at least a few PNM conversations need to take place on the first floor of the house. These measures are intended to prevent the PNM from feeling singled out and keep PNMs from forming a first impression based on something like clothing that reveals little about their personality (Ponticelli interview 2012).

However, in this inclusion process that aims to equalize everything during recruitment, one part that ironically distinguishes one house from another is the wheelchair-accessible accommodations. Carly admitted that at least during Open House, she found herself making decisions on which sorority to join at least partly based on their level of accessibility rather than which group of women she actually liked the best (Carly interview 2012). The uniformity achieved through the required matching t-shirts and canvas bags, therefore, might also be applied to accessibility standards. Truly equalizing the chapter houses' accommodations would allow PNMs to focus solely on finding the chapter that is best for them rather than on how well the physical structure of the house can accommodate their wheelchairs. It would put more emphasis on the PNM's personality and take the focus off of her disability. After all, Carly said that she joined because while she loved her friends with disabilities in the Nugent dormitory, a lot of focus was placed on the disability—something she never experienced growing up. When you are surrounded by people in wheelchairs, she said, the wheelchair

becomes the focus. Similarly, when a PNM becomes surrounded by struggles to access even just the first floor of a house, she can easily begin to focus only on how easy or difficult it will be to participate in chapter events rather than on how much she bonds with the women in the chapter.

The accessibility of the social aspects of a sorority proves to be a significant factor for women with disabilities who consider participating in formal recruitment. Though Carly decided to disregard the accessibility of the chapter after Open House and focus instead on her connection with the members of the chapter, the consideration of the limits of full inclusion is one that stopped Rebecca from participating in formal recruitment. She noted that most of the bonding that goes on between members does not happen at scheduled times, but in the smaller moments the women experience when living together in the chapter house. Not only are women in wheelchairs unable to live in the sorority houses, but members of chapters that only have temporary ramps must call ahead of time or post it on their social media page, ask for the ramps to be set up, and wait to enter, according to Carly. She conceded that there have been many instances in which people forget or she forgets to let them know ahead of time and she calls and then waits outside for the ramps to be set up. She insisted that the women of her chapter have been more than willing to work with her and have welcomed her participation in their events, but she looks forward to having a permanent ramp installed at her chapter house in order to further improve the level of accessibility in her house. Without Carly as a member of their chapter, however, it is unclear whether they would be going to such great lengths to ensure accessibility. What is clear is that Carly's presence in the chapter has brought the need for accommodations to the forefront of their agendas because chapter members have spent enough time with her to know what she wants and needs to feel even more a part of the chapter. At the time of her interview, Carly noted that her chapter had plans to install a permanent ramp.

Steps to increase accessibility in sorority life are not limited to structural elements like ramps and doorways. Carly's chapter invited the "Breaking the Odds" bloggers to present at one of their chapter meetings as part of an effort to dissolve social barriers between the Greek System and the disability community. These University of Illinois students with disabilities address misconceptions about people with disabilities and how they adapt to the challenges of college life as people with disabilities—more importantly as students who want social acceptance and to participate in everything the University has to offer (O'Donnell), including social events at campus bars and forming relationships with students of all kinds. The bloggers are University of Illinois students with disabilities or Physical Assistants to students with disabilities who are aware of the daily experiences of students with disabilities and are dedicated to correcting these misconceptions. Their work aligns with the goal of Panhellenic Council to reach a "mutual understanding" among members of the Greek system. Overall, their mission is to solve the question that Carly and Rebecca have also raised: "What is the point of giving people with disabilities access to the world if that world doesn't particularly like, understand or care to understand them?"

In many ways, the Panhellenic community has already put forth substantial effort to accommodate women with disabilities during formal recruitment, but it is important for those who plan and execute formal recruitment to consistently reflect and reevaluate their procedures to avoid the mindset that ramps equal accessibility. According to Cetin, the new VP Recruitment each year works with advisors from Fraternity and Sorority Affairs and the previous VP Recruitment to transition into her role. However, as an added measure, it would be particularly helpful to receive constructive criticism from anyone who was given special accommodations during formal recruitment. This feedback could contribute to establishing some sort of procedure in the Recruitment Bylaws, such as meeting with the PNM in a wheelchair prior to recruitment to discuss her specific needs. Especially within recruitment

that is supposed to create an environment in which women get to know each other based on conversation alone, PNMs should not have to worry about whether or not they can enter the house and be able to spend more time getting to know the members of the chapter.

If Carly's experience is any indication, the current system of providing accommodations, though well-intentioned and functional, is like one of those handmade sweaters you get for Christmas from a relative who you do not have the heart to tell, "I'm never going to wear this." You are genuinely grateful that someone would spend so much time and effort to make you happy, but if dear old Aunt Suzie had just taken the time to ask you what you wanted, she could have spent her time on something that better suited you. In other words, if Panhellenic Council hopes to further their mission of reaching a mutual understanding between all members of what accommodations suit a PNM, the process needs to be two-sided—that is, Panhellenic Council must move forward and open a dialogue between the women who want to rush and the women who direct the recruitment processes. This could be anything from letting a PNM who needs a ramp do a walk-through of the houses before she has to go through the recruitment event to simply offering a one-on-one meeting with them to address any concerns they may have. Bolstering these efforts of inclusion will allow her to forget her concerns as a woman in a wheelchair during formal recruitment and focus on finding the chapter she wants to be a part of for the duration of her college years.

Ideally, every house should have a permanent ramp to enable "visitability," a concept that the United States Access Board has introduced (Greif 2012, 8), that applies to Carly's experience of needing to call ahead and schedule a visit every time she wants to stop by her chapter house. If visitability were to be increased, then women with disabilities would be able to access their house on a regular basis and stop by whenever their schedule permitted instead of needing to coordinate their visits ahead of time. This would provide sorority members in wheelchairs the opportunity to socialize with their sisters in the same way able-bodied sisters can, which would in turn serve to strengthen the relationships that Rebecca considers inaccessible as a result of how inaccessible and "non-visitable" sorority houses currently are. She considers one of the most important parts of making sorority life socially accessible is "changing people's hearts and minds and just making disability more apparent, and less intimidating and scary." This helps to ease any "awkward" social anxieties surrounding interaction with people with disabilities, which occur when people in a social situation will talk around you but not to you, according to Rebecca. Addressing these social anxieties is a step toward encouraging people who share Rebecca's apprehensions about formal recruitment to change their minds and decide to participate. The increase in visitability of sorority houses has the potential to make more PNMs in wheelchairs interested in joining a sorority and ultimately could help create a truly diverse, inclusive Greek community.

Further, to combat the apathy from the Society for Preservation of Greek Houses, an organization that provides grant funding for renovation of houses and helps chapters to register in the National Register of Historic Places (Greif 2012, 6), sororities need to realize how strongly their chapters' values and needs call for accessibility—at the very least, accessibility to their front doors. After all, ramps are not just an accommodation for people with disabilities. Of the 14 sororities surveyed, all reported that they had weekly, if not monthly, activities and visits from their alumnae. Any of these elderly women or women with young children could need to bring a wheelchair or a stroller into the house. Moreover, a family member of one of the chapter members or even a chapter member that unexpectedly became injured and must be on crutches or in a wheelchair would benefit from ramps and the increased participation from women in wheelchairs that would result.

Achieving even the one small step in the process of reaching full accessibility compliance with the

Americans with Disabilities Act by building a ramp would significantly push Panhellenic sororities toward the realization of the mutual understanding and pride for which they strive. As Carly noted, "Everybody loves a ramp." The Panhellenic community should be no exception.

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# Health & the University: An Ethnographic Approach

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**Abstract**

*This essay is a short study of Illinois State University's (ISU) student health agenda. The study examines ISU's perspective and approach on student health efforts, infrastructure of health departments on campus, and ongoing Health Promotion and Wellness programs and their impact on campus and in the local community. Methods used include interviews with faculty in the Department of Health Wellness and Promotion, ethnographic observations of peer-to-peer health promotion programs, review of Department of Health Promotion and Wellness sponsored materials, and health behavior data. The principle finding is that the University's agenda and value of health reflects national cultural trends in that health is taken for granted and not a priority issue.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Illinois State University (ISU)'s campus is in the twin-cities community of Bloomington-Normal near the geographic center of the state of Illinois. The University is one of twelve public universities in Illinois and serves 18,207 undergraduate students and 2,295 graduate students as of 2013 ("Quick Facts About Illinois State" n.d.). Nearly 61% of undergraduate students are from the Chicago area, and another 21% from the local county and surrounding area ("Quick Facts About Illinois State" n.d.). This demographic brings a unique set of diverse students from the larger city and suburban areas to the predominantly Caucasian twin-cities. ISU's academic departments offer more than 160 major and minor options and 41 masters, specialist, and doctoral programs. ISU understands the important role they play in developing their diverse student body and preparing students for their career paths. The University serves as a home to thousands of students throughout the year, and strives to meet student's needs both in and out of the classroom.

One of the main responsibilities for a large public university like ISU is to care for their students' health. The University cares about students' health because of its positive correlation with academic success (Almeda 2011). According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC 2011), leading national education organizations recognize the close relationship between health and education, as well as the need to foster health and well-being within the educational environment for all students. The CDC (1998) claims that colleges and universities are important settings for delivering health promotion education and services to many young adults. But to what extent is ISU advocating to promote healthy behaviors in their students? Often universities struggle between balancing health promotion and education with treatment/medical services. In American culture, health is taken for granted as an individual is presumed healthy until they are sick. Accordingly, the United States spends much more on treatment than prevention (Scott 2009). Universities are embedded with the same culture and structure, but they can also serve as models for society and be on the front lines of creating a different culture of health care. On a health continuum, prevention efforts of health education/promotion lay on one end, and tertiary health (diagnosis, treatment, etc.) lay on the opposite. This research project examines ISU's perspective of health and where it lays on the continuum.

Before conducting my research, I made the

following assumptions as to why the University would invest in health promotion and wellness. The University exists to serve students. While the University must also tend to the health needs of faculty and staff, students are the University's priority population. Health and well-being are a strong foundation for students' academic success. As advocated by the CDC, the academic success of America's youth is strongly linked with their health. Scientific reviews have documented that school health programs can have positive affects on educational outcomes, as well as health-risk behaviors and health outcomes (Basch 2010). By integrating positive health behavior messages into the University's culture, inevitably a healthy student population can emerge. Lastly, health education and promotion fosters knowledge-seeking skills. Health Education Specialists (HES), and other in the health education sector, do not have all of the answers to health and medical questions as many people may assume. The role of a HES is to serve as a knowledgeable point of contact to guide a person to find the resources and solutions that best fit their needs; not give people definite yes or no answers and directions about their individual health situations. Health promotion campaigns on campus serve the same purpose. They work to provide insight on an issue and the resources of how to obtain further information. This creative design encourages the individual to exercise their own knowledge-seeking skills. These skills are transferable and can be used beyond finding resources for one's health needs. Knowledge-seeking skills are capable of enhancing self-efficiency and are beneficial to a student beyond college.

## II. METHODS

Four interviews were conducted during the course of this research project. Three of the four interviews were with faculty of the ISU Department of Health Promotion and Wellness. These faculty members were the director of Health Promotion and Wellness and the two coordinators of the department. The fourth interview was with a current ISU senior who is a member of the Student Wellness Ambassadorial Team (SWAT). Ethnographic observations at the peer health program G Spot, a portable gazebo that is set up around campus that distributes health promotion materials, were also conducted. In addition to the participant interviews, a review of materials produced by Health Promotion and Wellness were evaluated. Also an examination of the institutional report from the American College Health Association-National College Health Assessment was also conducted.

## III. BACKGROUND: HEALTH ISSUES FOR COLLEGE STUDENTS NATIONWIDE, WHAT ARE THE CONCERNS? HOW DOES ISU MEASURE UP?

The American College Health Association-National College Health Assessment (ACHA-NCHA) is a nationally recognized research survey that assists in collecting precise data about students' health habits, behaviors, and perceptions. A comprehensive picture of student's health is necessary as college students are a diverse yet distinct population with specific health risks and needs. Having current and relevant data about students helps universities enhance campus-wide health promotion and prevention services. Each year the ACHA-NCHA compiles an institutional report for participating universities, which usually number around fifty institutions. The report is a result of a survey that focuses on alcohol, tobacco, other drug use, sexual health, weight, nutrition, exercise, mental health, and personal safety and violence.

A summary of findings is included in each institutional report. This report is made available to the public through the ISU Health Promotion and Wellness website. Over the years, ISU has consistently fallen in the average range of national results. Considering sexual health at ISU, several important issues were highlighted. First, 22% of students report not having sex whereas 46% report that they have had sex with only one partner in the last 12 months (Almeda 2011:13). This is contrary to the

perception that most students are having sex with more than one partner at the same time. Health Promotion and Wellness faculty are using the information gathered from this survey to create messages that address the acceptance that ISU students are having sex and advocate the fact that students are not having sex with a lot of partners (Almeda 2011:13). Second, consistent condom use during vaginal intercourse appears to have increased significantly from 2005 (50%) to 2011 (68%) while condom use for anal sex also increased significantly since 2002 (Almeda 2011:13). Looking at the most commonly used drugs, alcohol, tobacco, and marijuana, the percentage of ISU students who reported using these drugs in the last 30 days decreased significantly since 2002 for tobacco use, stayed about the same for alcohol, and decreased for marijuana through 2009 before slightly increasing in 2011 (Almeda 2011:13). Health issues that have the most negative impact on academic performance at ISU are: 1) stress, 2) sleep difficulties, 3) anxiety, and 4) cold/flu/sore throat (Almeda 2011:12). Significant impacts of these health issues may lead to a student receiving an incomplete in class, dropping a course, receiving a lower grade on an exam, project or course.

## IV. Health Services at ISU: Student Health Services & Health Promotion and Wellness

ISU offers a number of student services including nonremedial tutoring, women's center, health insurance, and health series. As with other universities, ISU has always had a Department of Student Health Services for vaccinations, examinations, and treatment. The mission of Student Health Services at ISU is to enhance the health and wellness of their students, individually and as a campus community, in order to enrich their education experiences and future lifestyles ("Student Health Services" n.d.). The Department of Health Promotion & Wellness was established in 2009 to focus on promoting positive health messages for behavior change occurring on the individual and community level through educational and environmental strategies. The mission of Health Promotion and Wellness is to foster a thriving, engaged campus community that advances wellness at all levels ("Mission Statement" n.d.). While Student Health Services is more aligned with focusing on individual students' health through tertiary care, Health Promotion and Wellness is geared to the masses and looks to reach out to the entire campus community through educating and raising awareness for preventative measures.

Prior to 2009, faculty and staff working on issues of health promotion and wellness were done through a sector of the Department of Human Resources. However, even though faculty and staff were working through Human Resources, they were considered part of Student Health Services. While little data regarding the emergence and founding of Health Promotion and Wellness can be found online, the interviewees described this split as a need for two different units. A contributing factor was that Student Health Services, to an extent, overshadowed health promotion efforts because of their ability to provide direct medical services to students. One of the ways this was most evident was by there being more support to provide funding to the medical services rather than the prevention efforts. Faculty found it difficult to constantly compete .for funding when the tertiary care was favored

## V. Findings: Funding and Priorities for Tertiary Care

The internal University's debate to invest specific funds into the establishment of a department for health promotion and wellness is a reflection of America's perspective on health. Both coordinators expressed in their interviews how as a culture we tend to ignore our health behaviors until we become sick. And, in many cases, even when people begin to realize they are not in adequate health, they do not seek medical care until they are in a worsened condition. This is possibly explained by how individuals view and define health. Health is generally viewed narrowly as not

being sick rather than holistic wellbeing. The physical aspect dominates the other dimensions of health, such as intellectual, emotional, social, vocational, environmental, and spiritual health.

This skewed perception of health is not surprising, nor is the reasoning for the separation of Health Wellness & Promotion and Student Health Services. In the United States, only three cents of every dollar spent on healthcare goes towards prevention efforts (American Public Health Association 2013). This is fascinating, as well as discouraging considering that seven out of ten diseases can be prevented through lifestyle health behaviors (American Public Health Association 2013). One of the Health Promotion and Wellness coordinators described the situation as, "When push comes to shove, health prevention efforts are usually not a priority," (Health Promotion and Wellness Faculty Member, interview, November 14, 2012).

Many institutions have adopted a philosophy of freedom with responsibility, thus giving students the freedom to choose their own actions but holding them responsible for the choices they make. For incoming and returning students who are leaving home to attend college, students might over indulge in personal freedom and participate in risk behaviors they may not actively participate in back home. In a national survey conducted by Susquehanna University's Center for Adolescent Research &Education (CARE) and Students Against Destructive Decisions (SADD) (2013), approximately one-third of teens are experimenting with risky behaviors; many for the first time during their first semester at college. The survey states that roughly one-third of current college students surveyed reported drinking alcohol (37%), engaging in intimate sexual behavior (37%), or having sexual intercourse (32%) during their first semester at college. It is important that colleges and universities do more to promote healthy practices and wellbeing of students. As self-reliant as students may seem, they are still being molded into young adults and are susceptible to peer pressure and inclined to engage in risky behavior (Skorton 2012). Colleges and universities need to think creatively about the challenges of overcoming risk behaviors. Students will always be faced with risky choices, college can and should fulfill their educational missions by promoting safety through education and the provision of support services that will assist students in exercising their freedom responsibly (Skorton 2012).

## VI. The Value of Health at the University Level: Differences In Faculty Opinions

The difference in Health Promotion and Wellness faculty opinions regarding the value of health at the university level is the most interesting finding. Both coordinators expressed how they continue to make sincere efforts in health promotion, yet they are continuously faced with many challenges. They argued that there needs to be support for health promotion on all levels at the University, with people in higher administrative positions taking more initiative. When asked how they handled situations when others are not open to promoting health as a greater priority, they responded, "It's like water on a stone. You keep repeating the message." Both of the coordinators spoke on the topic with a passion about being advocates of health promotion, sincerely believing that through consistent positive health behavior messages, they could enhance the quality of health in students. Beyond providing direct health messages, Health Promotion and Wellness faculty provide students with the knowledge-seeking skills, tools and resources that are going to give students an advantage beyond college to make healthier lifestyle choices.

Health Promotion and Wellness works to disburse positive messages of health behaviors, promote awareness of various health issues, and encourage knowledge-seeking skills. Toilet Talks, informational flyers posted in individual toilet stalls, are one way which the department disperses their messages around campus. Every

month, they design an informational flyer highlighting one health topic, how it impacts the students on ISU's campus, steps individuals can take to manage that issue and local available resources. Toilet Talks highlight a variety of health topics including immunizations, condom use, stress and time management, weather safety, physical activity, nutrition and the importance of sleep. The Toilet Talks are strategic in that they approach health holistically. Rather than only creating awareness for physical health, they promote awareness of the seven dimensions of wellness. Toilet Talks is also strategic in that they provide action steps that are basic and applicable to the everyday student to implement while also providing them with resources to find more information online and in their immediate community. By providing students with the initial action steps for changing their individual health behaviors, Health Promotion and Wellness is encouraging students to begin to take their health into their own hands.

The director of the department was no less sincere in expressing the need for health promotion efforts at the University. However, what did significantly differ was her perspective on how the University values health. She made the argument that students are the University's priority and so is their health, and that they do not have to sell anybody on it, including administrators. She went on to describe how there are no problems with funding, that this is why the department was created. She mentions that Health Promotion and Wellness being its own department and having that type of visibility is an extension of how the University values health.

These clashing faculty opinions on how the University values health was difficult to analyze. It is assumed that the two coordinators work closely with the director, and are as informed about issues regarding the department. Yet why such different answers? One conclusion regards the dynamics of power and representation. The director is the principle spokesperson of the department. This being the case, perhaps she censors her responses about the University more intensively. In the participant interviews I found that the director paused to collect her thoughts before answering. Was she using that time to reflect on the question? Or a construct a perfect answer?

## VII. Peer-to-Peer Education Key to Health Promotion on Campus

SWAT and the G Spot are the most visible entities of Health Promotion and Wellness programs. SWAT, is a registered student organization that strives to promote healthy behaviors and lifestyles to ISU and the local community through a variety of programs and services. SWAT members are a group of ISU student volunteers from all majors with diverse backgrounds. As members, they are required to attend a weekend training retreat and weekly training sessions during the fall and/or spring semesters to learn the latest information and research on health issues. These members are trained by Health Promotion and Wellness faculty and staff to promote and talk to fellow students about a variety of health issues. They help staff the G Spot, a portable gazebo that travels to different points around campus. The gazebo is mainly utilized by students as a source of free condoms and a comfortable go-to place to ask their peers questions about sexual health and sexual health resources. Recognizing that the gazebo was the central hub of sexual health information for students, Health Promotion and Wellness faculty and staff named the gazebo "The G Spot" as a play on words from the popularized sexologist term "g-spot," also called Grafenberg spot; which is characterized as an erogenous area of the vagina that, when stimulated, may lead to strong sexual arousal and a powerful orgasm (Rosenthal 2012: 76). The gazebo travels to various locations on campus each week to provide wellness and health information, materials on a large variety of health topics, condoms, and fun giveaways for ISU students, faculty and staff.

As a student I have witnessed the popularity of the G Spot on campus. I had conducted

multiple ethnographic observations of the G Spot on campus. For each day of observation, I noted there was consistent traffic throughout the day at the gazebos. The G Spot appears at various locations on campus on different days of the week, enhancing their chances of being utilized by all students. In an interview with a SWAT member, she described the purpose of the G Spot as a place for students to feel comfortable to ask questions and talk about health-related topics, especially sex. She described how there is not much dialogue exchanged between students who stop by and SWAT members - it's about the atmosphere. The member explained how at the G Spot different ages interact with the gazebo differently.

> "Younger aged students tend to come in pairs or groups. Most people who ask questions tend to be younger students, and ask questions timidly. Sometimes younger guys come and ask questions just to be funny, as if it were a dare. In cases like that we just are sure to give information objectively. Older students usually just come take condoms and leave."

In the interview with the student, I asked what made SWAT and the G Spot successful and/or not successful. Regarding success she said,

> "The program creates a comfortable vibe. Instead of a lecture where you're just sitting and listening, you can ask your own questions. And because it's students talking to students it makes things easier to talk about. For example, someone asked me why we provide lubricant. We explained why and how it helps to not break a condom. And that was it, and they walked away question answered. I think that's much better than having to raise your hand in a classroom and ask in front of others. I think a lot of people don't want to admit that they don't know."

In terms of not being as successful, she described issues regarding age and generation gaps,

> "…Well older adults sometimes come by, most of the time seem *judgey*. They have the mentality that sex is not okay until marriage and here we are saying that it is okay… Gets awkward sometimes. But we know what we stand for and as long as students are safe and healthy and we continue to promote these health topics and don't feel intimidated. It also throws things off when adults stop by. It stops students from approaching the booth."

Overall the student expressed how SWAT and the G Spot are a value to the ISU community. These programs are a way to get teachers involved with students, and in turn have those students pass on knowledge to their peers.

Peers play the most significant role in an undergraduate's growth and development during college (Astin 1993, Pascarella & Terenzini 2005). Peer health education on college campuses has been shown to impact positive health behavior (BACCHUS n.d., White et. al 2009). Positive health behaviors are behaviors that prevent and reduce risks of unwanted health issues. For example, limiting alcoholic beverages while going out and ensuring the individual has a designated driver or a safe means of getting home are positive health behaviors as they reduce the risks of binge drinking, impaired driving, and possible sexual intercourse and drug use associated with binge drinking. Many universities, including ISU, participate in BACCHUS (Boosting Alcohol Consciousness Concerning the Health of University Students) and other peer health education programs. Organization like BACCHUS work to actively promote student and young adult-based, campus and community-wide leadership on healthy and safe lifestyle decisions concerning alcohol abuse, tobacco use, illegal drug use, unhealthy sexual practices and other high risk behaviors (BACCHUS n.d.). Peer health programs empower students and administrators to voice their opinions and needs to create a healthier and safer campus

and community.

## VIII. Recommendations for the University

My first recommendation is that the University, beyond the Health Promotion and Wellness program, express their support of health promotion by integrating their value of health into campus culture. While this may be a difficult challenge with administrators, being stronger advocates for health promotion and education would expedite the process of integrating health promotion efforts into the campus values. Initiatives on various university levels should demonstrate a supportive a commitment to health and health promotion. This could be achieved by Health Promotion and Wellness working with various other departments on campus for bi-monthly campaigns towards health issues. Another way university representatives could show their support would be to co-sponsor a health promotion event or seminar that includes both students and university representatives working together. The University could also initiate specific studies and surveys to better understand the student's perceptions of health services on campus and how it equates to success in the classroom.

As a second recommendation, the University should provide larger campaigns regarding health services on campus and the local community. Many students on campus are unaware of the health services provided by the University or don't feel that the staff is as qualified as their personal physician. One method in which this can be achieved is by integrating a campus services scavenger hunt during their first year orientation which will allow students to become familiar with the location of the services and connect with staff on a personal level. Another approach is to encourage students to meet at least once with a representative from Health Promotion and Wellness, or Counseling Services. This setup would mirror how students are encouraged to meet with their academic advisor and financial aid advisor at least once a semester to discuss their academic and financial path. By fostering a relationship between students and representatives from Health Promotion and Wellness and Counseling Services, ISU can better monitor the individual health needs of its students.

My third recommendation is for the Health Promotion and Wellness to recognize that the incoming student body is no longer the traditional students from high school expecting to finish college in four years. Greater emphasis should be placed on recognizing that the phrase 'first year students' doesn't refer to only freshman. Health Promotion and Wellness messages should refine their promotion messages adequately tend to the health needs of veterans, students with disabilities and non-traditional students (individuals granted campus services who are not part of the university's primary constituent groups). This could be accomplished by conducting a survey to examine what the needs of these student groups are and how their perception of having their health needs met at Illinois State University.

## IX. Conclusion

The perspective of the University's view on the value of student's health does not appear to attract to a particular side of the health continuum. While Health Promotion and Wellness continues to advocate and sponsor successful peer-to-peer programs for the campus community, little advocacy is initiated by others at the University to integrate health into campus infrastructure. As a University, the institution's overall stance does not appear to emphasize the important relationship that exists between health and academic success. Health Promotion and Wellness continues to lay down a strong foundation of student health outreach services that perhaps in the future the University as a whole will build upon.

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# Reflections on Teaching an EUI Course

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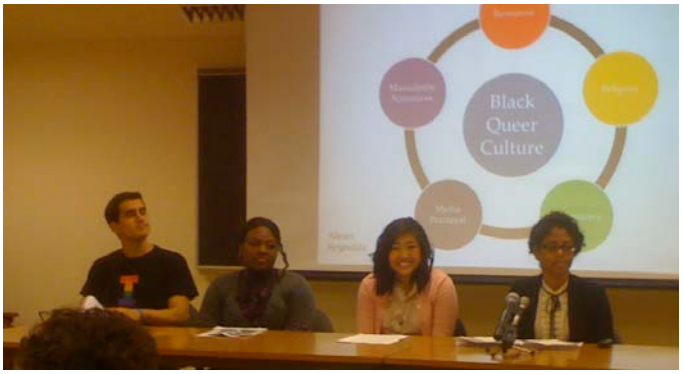
I have taught my course "Locating Queer Culture" (GWS 467) twice for the Ethnography of the University Initiative (EUI), since Spring 2009. This course revolves around two key questions: How might we understand the role of Midwestern public universities like the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC) – and their surrounding communities – in the production of queer culture? And how might such knowledge revise our understanding of queer culture and its locations, both in the past and in the present? Students who have taken the course tend to be majoring in Humanities and Social Sciences fields, including Gender and Women's Studies, English, History, Economics, Spanish, Anthropology, Psychology, and Sociology. They do not all identify as "queer," "lesbian," or "gay." Students are from a variety of racial and ethnic backgrounds, including Latina/o, African American, Asian American, and White students. Using our own university as both the object and site for primary research on queer culture, the course introduces undergraduate students to two research methods: archival research and ethnography. There is, of course, nothing inherently queer about either method, so the course involves first introducing students to the basic tools of each approach. But we also consider the extent to which taking queer culture as the object of study might require us to adjust these methods. What, in other words, are the possibilities for queering archival and ethnographic research methods?

The course is designed to help students see that knowledge does not simply exist "out there" in the world, but that it is actively produced and preserved by people like themselves. This is true for any culture, but is especially relevant for queer culture, because it has historically been overlooked or minimized in scholarship on American culture generally. Thus, the course focuses on a vital but contested element of the university and its surrounding community that is often neglected in "official" university records, narratives, and histories. After reading and studying examples of existing s in two research assignments: (1) an archival research project on some aspect of local queer history at UIUC; and (2) an ethnographic research project on some aspect of contemporary queer culture at UIUC. Thus students both draw upon the existing archives of the university and contribute to these archives by producing their own original research on queer culture.

Students have tackled an amazing range of subjects, from coming out in fraternities, to the experiences of queer women of color, the history of lesbian student activism, the university's role as a resource for local queer youth, the experiences of Black gay men at UIUC, the intersections of LGBT and Christian communities on campus, lesbian and gay issues in sexual health programs at UIUC, and queering the curriculum. I'm very proud that this course has provided space for students to pursue such impressive original research, which they have all presented publicly at the EUI conference and which is now archived in IDEALS. I've learned an incredible amount from my students and look forward to the chance to teach this EUI course again soon.



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**Note:** This is a student project from a course affiliated with the Ethnography of the University Initiative. EUI supports faculty development of courses in which students conduct original research on their university, and encourages students to think about colleges and universities in relation to their communities and within larger national and global contexts.

# Out and About: Social Spaces and the LGBT Community

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