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# The role of Phi Theta Kappa membership in community college student engagement

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**The role of Phi Theta Kappa membership in community college student engagement**

by

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A dissertation submitted to the graduate faculty  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

Major: Education (Educational Leadership)

Program of Study Committee:  
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Ames, Iowa

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## ABSTRACT

Enrollment in American community colleges has increased dramatically over the last few decades. Currently, close to one half of all undergraduate students in the United States are enrolled in a community college. Historically, community college students were often viewed as at-risk for noncompletion of their educational program. A component of the educational experience identified by researchers that can be used to predict college persistence is the existence of high levels of student engagement (Astin, 1999). Many student behavior variables may be used to quantitatively measure student engagement. These variables include: time spent preparing for class, participation level during class discussions, level of interaction with an instructor outside of the classroom, and participation levels in college-sponsored activities and organizations.

One opportunity available to community college students that can assist with establishing high levels of student engagement is membership in Phi Theta Kappa. Phi Theta Kappa is recognized as the international honor society of 2-year colleges. It is the largest honor society in American higher education with a membership of over 2 million. Phi Theta Kappa's purpose is to recognize scholarly achievement while also offering opportunities for personal growth and development by sponsoring a variety of programs centered on the hallmarks of scholarship, service, leadership, and fellowship.

As membership in Phi Theta Kappa is by invitation only based upon a minimum cumulative grade point average of 3.5, it is broadly assumed that Phi Theta Kappa members are actively engaged in the learning process at the 2-year college level. Determining the level of student engagement for Phi Theta Kappa members was the purpose of this study.

The unit of analysis was the Phi Theta Kappa members currently enrolled in an Iowa or Texas community college who responded to the Phi Theta Kappa member survey.

An electronic survey instrument, created for this study to collect data from the target population, focused on background information, academic achievement, level of involvement, and types of involvement. Of the 16,777 sample set, 822 surveys were completed resulting in a 4.9% response rate. The low response rate was disappointing but provided a viable sample size.

Results indicate the sample population consisted primarily of White/Caucasian female students between the ages of 25 and 29. In addition, those responding self-reported having high academic achievement and spending a substantial number of hours per week studying. Phi Theta Kappa members are academically engaged and academically successful. Classroom participation is strong but students spend little time on the community college campus. High academic engagement levels relating to the classroom experience exist, but limited involvement occurs outside the classroom. Additionally, the majority (78%) spend at least some time volunteering or engaging in community work but not in a service learning capacity. The engagement level of Phi Theta Kappa sponsored activities is low as only 15% of the sample responded as participating in any of the program of study events recommended by Phi Theta Kappa headquarters. Results of this study indicate that, although membership in Phi Theta Kappa may reflect intellectual competence and active involvement in the classroom, low integration of civic engagement occurs

The findings of this study provide valuable information to Phi Theta Kappa program directors and community college campus administrators. The information from this study

provides empirical data that can be used to guide curricular and co-curricular planning within the community college.



## CHAPTER ONE. INTRODUCTION

Much has been written about the importance of student involvement and student effort in the learning process and the impact of such on the academic success of the American college student. A great deal of the existing literature has focused on the traditional college student attending a 4-year college or university. The impact of student effort and involvement, which is often referred to as student engagement, for the community college student has recently attracted the attention of researchers. Phi Theta Kappa is recognized as the international honor society of 2-year colleges, and demonstrates a commitment to designing programs that support the premise that student involvement is linked to a more positive educational experience and, ultimately, academic success.

Phi Theta Kappa is an academic honor society that has established its presence at most American community colleges. This honor society does not just focus on increasing membership; it promotes active academic, civic, and social engagement by providing a variety of activities all based on the four hallmarks of Phi Theta Kappa: scholarship, service, leadership, and fellowship. Approximately 100,000 community college students are inducted into Phi Theta Kappa each year. The relationship between student engagement and membership in Phi Theta Kappa is unclear, but with a membership of over 2 million, it is a population that warrants closer examination.

### Statement of the Problem

Student engagement is a broadly defined term used to refer to the extent to which students are actively involved in meaningful educational experiences and activities. Multiple theories have been developed that suggest factors associated with student engagement can be used as predictors of college academic success (Bowell & Wilson, 2004; McClenney, 2004;

Pace, 1981). McClenney (2004) described the key to understanding student learning and persistence is to first understand the effects of current efforts.

American community colleges are 2-year institutions of higher education structured to serve all segments of society through an open-access admission policy. These institutions are recognized as providing both credit and noncredit instruction in both the liberal arts and career and technical education. The American Association of Community Colleges (AACC; 2010) reported that enrollment in community college credit courses totaled 8.0 million in 2009 with the majority (60%) of the students attending on a part-time basis. The total enrollment at U.S. community colleges experienced a 16.9% growth from 2007 to 2009 (AACC, 2010). Most community college students commute to campus and often juggle work and/or family obligations.

The mission of Phi Theta Kappa is to encourage participation in activities and experiences closely associated with student engagement. Phi Theta Kappa fosters a collaborative culture dedicated to encouraging students to develop personal leadership skills that will allow them to become positive social change agents. Phi Theta Kappa programming provides a framework focused on student development around a central theme that promotes civic and collegiate engagement, empowering students to determine the specific activities best suited to their institution's climate and culture.

The connection between student engagement and Phi Theta Kappa is not an area that has attracted the attention of educational researchers in the past. It is important to note that, based upon the sheer number of community college students in the United States and the number of these same students who join Phi Theta Kappa, multiple opportunities exist for research topics.

An examination of current research focusing on the level of effort college students demonstrate during their academic experiences supports the theory that active involvement in the learning process is a key indicator of academic success (Astin, 1984; Pace, 1981; Tinto & Russo, 1994). Extensive research on student engagement consistently suggests that student engagement is tied to desired educational outcomes such as increased learning, persistence in college, and graduation.

The Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) was established in 2001 as a project of the Community College Leadership Program at the University of Texas at Austin. The intention behind the creation of CCSSE was to produce new information about the community college experience and to provide valuable data to participating institutions. These data then could be used to introduce changes in community college programming in an effort to improve student learning and retention. CCSSE's survey instrument, the Community College Student Report, provides information on student engagement. The survey asks questions that assess institutional practices and student behaviors that are correlated highly with student learning and student retention. Data obtained from the CCSSE instrument are intended to be used as a tool for improving teaching and learning by assessing the extent to which students are engaging in good educational practices at community and technical colleges.

Although the relationship between student engagement and desired outcomes is clear, no research has been conducted identifying the relationship between Phi Theta Kappa membership and student engagement levels at American community colleges. "Just as access to college is an empty promise without effective promises that promote student success, improved college completion will have real meaning only with serious and sustained

attention to the quality of what goes on between teachers and students” (Community College Survey of Student Engagement [CCSSE], 2010, p. 4).

The lack of research on the effect Phi Theta Kappa membership has on the community college student makes it difficult to analyze the engagement value of Phi Theta Kappa-sponsored activities. Determining the level of student engagement on the part of Phi Theta Kappa members was the primary goal of this study.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to provide a quantitative research-based analysis regarding the role Phi Theta Kappa membership has on the student engagement level of American community college students. The research will add to the body of knowledge on the student engagement level of community college students.

This study used an electronic survey to explore a sample of Texas and Iowa Phi Theta Kappa members to gain further insight into the role membership in the honor society of Phi Theta Kappa has on the student engagement level of community college students.

The Iowa region was selected for a pilot project as the researcher was familiar with the Iowa region and had served as a Phi Theta Kappa advisor for 7 years, including the time-frame when Iowa was recognized as an independent region, making Iowa the youngest Phi Theta Kappa region. The research project was expanded to include the Texas region upon the recommendation of Phi Theta Kappa headquarters, as it was the first region to be established. Phi Theta Kappa headquarters was interested in seeing a comparison of the data for the oldest and youngest regions.

### **Theoretical Perspective**

This study is based upon the theoretical framework of the student engagement model. The student engagement theory is based upon the early works of Astin (1984, 1985), Pace (1981, 1984), and Tinto and Russo (1994). Although there are important differences in the theoretical perspectives explaining how students change across time as a result of their college experiences, student engagement underlies the major theoretical frameworks explaining change during the college years for 2-year college students. Active involvement in the learning process from both an academic and social perspective has been well documented as contributing significantly to student success. Student engagement theory contends that a positive correlation exists between student engagement and student learning, which ultimately leads to higher persistence. Research has supported the theory that, the more engaged students are in the learning process, the more committed they are to the educational experience (Kuh, Schuh, Whitt, & Associates, 1991; Kuh, Whitt, & Strange, 1989). Phi Theta Kappa has developed educational and civic engagement programs designed to improve the quality of the 2-year college experience. A review of the relationship between membership in Phi Theta Kappa and student engagement is conducted within this study.

A number of theories have attempted to adequately explain student achievement. Student effort and student engagement level are two terms that are often used when discussing factors that affect student success. Robert Pace (1981) was among the first to focus on the relationship between student effort and the quality of the educational experience. Pace's work continues to provide the foundation for current studies related to student interaction and academic achievement.

Studies focusing on measuring the quality of undergraduate education based upon the students' experiences and self-analysis of their own effort level have found a strong correlation exists between effort level and the quality of education received (Astin, 1993; Pace, 1981). An examination of current research focusing on the effort level college students demonstrate during their academic experiences supports the theory that active involvement in the learning process is a key indicator of academic achievement (Astin, 1984; Kuh et al., 1981, 1989; Pace, 1981; Tinto & Russo, 1994).

McClenney (2004) described student engagement theory as focusing on students becoming actively involved in the learning process and as the correlation between student engagement and academic persistence. In addition, Tinto, Pace, and Astin each have developed theories focusing on the investment of the student as it relates to time and energy spent on the college experience. Each one of the four theories mentioned above will be discussed and their findings reviewed.

### **Research Questions**

Five research questions will guide this study:

1. What are the background characteristics of Phi Theta Kappa members currently enrolled in Iowa and Texas community colleges?
2. How do the social background characteristics of current Iowa and Texas Phi Theta Kappa members differ? Specifically, are there statistically significant differences among current Iowa and Texas Phi Theta Kappa members' gender, age, ethnic background, marital status, and college enrollment by Phi Theta Kappa region?

3. How do current Iowa and Texas Phi Theta Kappa members compare when measuring participation in Phi Theta Kappa-sponsored events?
4. Are there statistically significant differences in the number and types of student engagement activities and experiences between the members of the two Phi Theta Kappa regions?
5. How do the descriptive statistics of the sample group compare to the 2010 CCSSE cohort?

### **Significance of the Study**

The comprehensive statistical research of this project will provide insight into the effect Phi Theta Kappa membership has on the student engagement level of community college students. Factors will be identified that contribute both positively and negatively to the student engagement level of the population.

### **Definitions of Terms**

*American Community College:* Publicly funded community-based 2-year colleges intended to offer educational opportunities to all segments of society through an open-admissions policy. The first community college was established in 1901, and approximately 1,200 community colleges exist today.

*Phi Theta Kappa:* The international honor society of 2-year colleges.

The purpose of Phi Theta Kappa shall be to recognize and encourage scholarship among two-year college students. To achieve this purpose, Phi Theta Kappa shall provide opportunity for the development of leadership and service, for an intellectual climate for exchange of ideas and ideals, for lively

fellowship for scholars, and for stimulation of interest in continuing academic excellence. (Phi Theta Kappa, 2009, ¶1)

*Phi Theta Kappa chapter:* An active chapter is one that is fully affiliated with the international headquarters of Phi Theta Kappa, is included on the roll of active chapters by having complied with the necessary requirements, and has been issued a charter.

*Phi Theta Kappa member:* To be eligible for membership a student must complete a minimum of 12 hours of associate degree course work and generally earn a grade point average (GPA) of 3.5 or higher. Students must maintain a high academic standing throughout their enrollment in the 2-year college, generally a 3.25 GPA or higher.

*Phi Theta Kappa region:* Phi Theta Kappa has 29 regional organizations, many being state organizations, which hold conventions and leadership conferences, offer awards and scholarship programs, and conduct Regional Honors Institutes. Regional organizations are headed by a regional coordinator (Phi Theta Kappa advisor) and elected student regional officers.

*Iowa Phi Theta Kappa region:* The Iowa Region has 28 chapters in the state of Iowa representing all 15 Iowa community colleges. The region was established in 2000, and as of May 2010, a total of 24,576 members had been inducted into Iowa chapters.

*Texas Phi Theta Kappa region:* The Texas Region has 88 chapters in the state of Texas representing 68 different colleges offering 2-year degrees, which includes all 55 community colleges in Texas. The Texas region was the first region of Phi Theta



Kappa and was established in 1972. As of May 2010, it boasts a membership of 238,117.

*Student engagement:* A broadly defined term used to refer to the extent to which students are actively involved in meaningful educational experiences and activities.

### **Delimitations and Limitations**

A limitation of this study was primarily the nature of the targeted population. This study was designed to provide a cross-sectional sample of the Phi Theta Kappa members attending a community college in Iowa or Texas during the spring semester of the 2009–2010 academic year. The study was delimited to only those variables used to assess the student engagement level included on the Phi Theta Kappa member survey instrument. In addition, the survey instrument was designed to be disseminated and administered electronically with one contact made with the students by an e-mail directing them to the survey website. A follow-up e-mail reminding students to complete the survey was sent 3 weeks after the initial email was sent. The responses to the survey items provided self-reported data that may not be free from individual bias.

This study was confined to Phi Theta Kappa members attending an Iowa or Texas community college during the spring semester of the 2009–2010 academic year who provided self-reported data. The purposive sampling procedure used will decrease the generalizability of the findings.

### **Summary**

This study sought to inform educators and policy makers by providing insight into the student engagement level of Phi Theta Kappa members and to identify factors that contribute both positively and negatively to student engagement.

Chapter one provides an overview of this study including the problem, purpose, theoretical perspective, research questions, significance, definition of terms and delimitations and limitations. Chapter two provides an overview of the literature reviewed for this dissertation proposal. The chapter begins with a summary about American community colleges followed by a description of the characteristics of the international honor society of Phi Theta Kappa. A review of the studies related to student engagement is next. The chapter concludes with an overview of the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) and specific information about the state demographic information and community college system for the states of Iowa and Texas.

Chapter three begins with a brief overview of the study including the research questions to be addressed. The remaining sections of the chapter present the methodology, research design, population and sample, instrumentation data collection results, and data analysis procedures. Chapter four provides an overview of the results of the statistical analyses of the study including descriptive and inferential statistics. Chapter five includes a summary and discussion of the findings of this study and includes suggestions for future research.

## CHAPTER TWO. LITERATURE REVIEW

### The Community College Student

According to the AACC (2010), more than 8 million students were enrolled in credit programs at American community colleges in the fall of 2009. This represents close to one half (43%) of all undergraduate students in the entire United States. The enrollment of U.S. community college students enrolled in credit courses increased 16.9% from 2007 to 2009. Additionally, 40% of all first time freshmen students enrolled at a community college in the fall 2009 semester. Demographic data for the fall 2009 community college student made available by the AACC (2010) include:

- The average age of the community college student is 28 with 46% of the population 21 years or younger,
- 56% of the student body is female,
- 42% are considered first-generation college students,
- 16% are single parents,
- 80% of the students enrolled full-time also are employed outside of school, and
- 40% of the students represent a minority group.

Students attending 2-year colleges are often viewed as at-risk for noncompletion of their educational program. An examination of community college students found that only 36% of postsecondary students who began their education at a community college in the 1995–1996 academic year had completed a degree within a 6-year time frame (Bailey et al., 2004). Yet, even with the high number of students not completing a degree program, more students are enrolling in community college each year. Pascarella and Terenzi (1998)

found that “between 1978 and 1991, enrollment in two-year colleges rose by 31% (versus 23% for four-year institutions)” (p. 153).

### **Phi Theta Kappa**

Phi Theta Kappa is the largest honor society in American higher education with more than 2 million members and 1,200 chapters located in all 50 of the United States, U.S. territories, British Virgin Islands, Canada, Germany, Marshall Islands, Micronesia, United Arab Emirates, and Palau. Phi Theta Kappa inducts approximately 100,000 members annually.

Phi Theta Kappa traces its beginnings to a society that originated with six charter members under the name of Kappa Phi Omicron at Stephens College in Columbia, Missouri, in 1910. The society continued to grow and in the spring of 1918 was one of many honorary groups in Missouri. At a meeting of the presidents of the Missouri junior colleges for women in 1918, it was decided to organize a new honorary society, chapters of which would have a common character, stand, and similarity of organization. The name Phi Theta Kappa was chosen, and the society was incorporated in Missouri as a national organization. Founders modeled many aspects of the new society after the prestigious senior college honorary society, Phi Beta Kappa. For the first 6 years, Phi Theta Kappa confined its activity to women’s junior colleges, but in 1924, through a constitutional amendment, the scope of the society was enlarged to cover all junior colleges.

In 1929, the AACC recognized Phi Theta Kappa as the international honor society of 2-year colleges. In the early years, Phi Theta Kappa membership was conferred to students at time of graduation and few programs and services were offered. The explosive growth of community colleges in the 1960s led Phi Theta Kappa to expand its mission to reflect the

nurturing philosophy of the institutions it served. Students were inducted as freshmen, and study programs were offered. Today, membership is offered to community college students who have earned a minimum of 12 credit hours from their college and have a minimum cumulative GPA of 3.50.

Phi Theta Kappa is governed by a board of directors comprising seven members, with representatives elected from various society constituencies (see organizational chart in Appendix A). Annually, five students are elected to serve as international officers during the society's international convention. One international officer is elected to a 1-year term to the board of directors. The headquarters staff of more than 50 is led by an executive director, who is appointed by the board.

The foundational support of Phi Theta Kappa is the local chapter. Because no two chapters are exactly alike, chapters must meet international minimum standards but are given a great deal of freedom in conducting their everyday affairs according to campus guidelines. At each campus where there is a chapter of Phi Theta Kappa, the college administration selects a faculty or staff member to serve as advisor of the local chapter. The advisor is the person designated by the community college to conduct the main correspondence with Phi Theta Kappa headquarters. Chapter advisors are considered the authority of the chapter from the perspective of the campus administration and Phi Theta Kappa headquarters. Each academic year, every community college chapter elects student officers. These students provide leadership and assist with conducting monthly meetings and developing local events and activities to support the programs established by Phi Theta Kappa headquarters.

Phi Theta Kappa has 29 regional organizations, many being state organizations, to assist in the management of the local community college chapters. Each region is charged

with the following duties: holding regional conventions and leadership conferences, offering awards and scholarship programs, and conducting Regional Honors Institutes. Regional organizations are headed by a regional coordinator (Phi Theta Kappa advisor) and elect student regional officers.

The state of Iowa and the state of Texas are each recognized as a discrete region. The Iowa region, Phi Theta Kappa's newest region, was established in 2000 and comprises 28 local chapters representing all 15 community colleges within the state of Iowa. As of May 2010, the Iowa regions had inducted a total of 24,576 members. The Texas region, established in 1972, is Phi Theta Kappa's oldest region and comprises 88 local chapters representing all 55 community college districts in Texas as well as other associate degree-granting institutions. The Texas region boasts a total membership of 238,117 members.

Phi Theta Kappa's mission is two-fold: (a) to recognize and encourage the academic achievement of 2-year college students and (b) to provide opportunities for individual growth and development through participation in honors, leadership, service, and fellowship programming. Each year, a program of study is introduced as a guideline for college chapters as they design their campus and community activities. It is estimated that 200,000 students participate in Phi Theta Kappa programs each year. Although Phi Theta Kappa places scholarship first in its mission, the society also encourages members to participate in civic engagement in the belief that scholars have a responsibility to serve.

Each chapter of Phi Theta Kappa participates in the five star chapter development program, which was developed to assist chapters in organizing local projects and initiatives. Each chapter submits information to Phi Theta Kappa headquarters on an annual basis describing the activities and events hosted by the local chapter that support the four

hallmarks of Phi Theta Kappa. The headquarters uses this information to rate the chapter on a grading scale from one to five each academic year. Earning the rating of five stars is interpreted as recognition that a chapter has achieved the highest standard of quality programming possible.

Additionally, Phi Theta Kappa has established partnerships with over 700 four-year colleges and universities. These 4-year institutions collectively provide over \$37 million in transfer scholarships to eligible Phi Theta Kappa members.

Phi Theta Kappa creates a support network and establishes a sense of community within the college experience.

The purpose of Phi Theta Kappa shall be to recognize and encourage scholarship among two-year college students. To achieve this purpose, Phi Theta Kappa shall provide opportunity for development of leadership and service, for an intellectual climate for exchange of ideas and ideals, for lively fellowship for scholars, and for stimulation of interest in continuing academic excellence. (Phi Theta Kappa, 2009, ¶1)

The focus on student development, including personal leadership skills, assists in preparing graduates with the knowledge and skills necessary to cope with emerging national and global issues. “Activities that emphasize scholarship, leadership, service, and fellowship provide the foundation, knowledge, and practical experience necessary to become a servant leader and a valued, engaged global citizen” (Phi Theta Kappa, 2010a, ¶1). Developing future leaders that inherently believe in civic responsibility and are willing to work collaboratively for social change is the responsibility of all higher education.

A summary of Phi Theta Kappa programming, which includes national, regional, and local activities is listed below:

- 5-star chapter development: Chapter level programming. Each star level (1–5) is outlined in the chapter resource manual. Types and quantity of activities involving members determine the chapter star rating, which is determined each year by Phi Theta Kappa headquarters.
- Hallmark Awards: An annual competition for chapters for each of the four hallmarks (scholarship, fellowship, leadership, and service). Each hallmark consists of an essay competition outlining the activities conducted to support the honors study topic theme and the impact of the chapter programming on its campus and communities.
- Honors Study Topic: At the individual, chapter, and regional levels. The honors study topic brings important, current issues to the fore and encourages Phi Theta Kappa members to examine how these issues affect their lives. The topic selected biennially by the Honors Committee, is utilized and explored through programs such as the annual International Honors Institute, the Honors Seminar Series, and the Honors Case Study Challenge. Operation Green was the theme selected for 2008–2010.
- Honors Case Study Challenge: In an effort to encourage scholarship while promoting civic engagement among college students, USA TODAY and Phi Theta Kappa have issued the Honors Case Study Challenge, in which Phi Theta Kappa chapters and individual members are invited to participate. The challenge provides chapters with the opportunity to supplement their Honors in Action research based



on the honors study topic with the use of the USA TODAY newspapers. The challenge also provides members an enhanced learning experience through the use of newspapers and encourages them to stay abreast of current events.

- **Honors Institute:** Annual 5-day conference held each June. Members, advisors, and alumni hear presentations by experts on various aspects of the Honors Study Topic, learn about Honors in Action, and enjoy time to discuss and reflect upon what they have learned in a small group setting.
- **Honors Seminar Series:** Lecture series showcasing honors study topic. Video presentation of world-renowned speakers is scheduled and hosted by Phi Theta Kappa headquarters.
- **Leadership Development Studies:** A humanities-based course using great works in literature, film, speeches, blogs, and experiential learning in the study of leadership. Available only at particular colleges certified by Phi Theta Kappa to offer the course.
- **Nota Bene Anthology:** Annual literary competition for members.
- **Relay for Life:** Annual fundraising event for American Cancer Society; individual and chapter level participation is encouraged.
- **International service project:** Operation Green was theme selected for 2008–2010. Individual, chapter, and regional level involvement is expected.
- **International convention:** Annual international convention hosted by international headquarters for members, officers, and advisors. It is the largest convention of college students in the nation. Phi Theta Kappans gather at the convention every

year to listen to exciting speakers, participate in workshops, honor each other's hard work, and celebrate membership.

- Regional convention: Annual regional convention for members, officers, and advisors.
- Project Graduation: Chapters collect nonperishable food items and books at their commencements and graduation events for donation to their local communities.
- Voice Your Vote: A voter awareness campaign that encourages chapters to conduct activities to empower potential voters.
- Regional officer training: Annual training conducted by a regional coordinator for regional officers.
- Regional Leadership Conference: Annual conference hosted by region for members, officers, and advisors.
- International leadership training: Annual training conducted by international headquarters for international and regional officers.

Membership in Phi Theta Kappa is by invitation only, based on cumulative GPA, is available only to current community college students, and involves a one-time membership fee. Currently members pay an international membership fee of \$45, a regional fee which can vary but is typically \$10, and a local chapter fee which is established at the local level but averages \$7. Once joining Phi Theta Kappa, membership is life-time as long as membership has not been revoked while the member was a community college student. Revocation of membership can occur if the cumulative GPA while a community college student falls below 3.25 for two consecutive semesters.

The time a member devotes to Phi Theta Kappa is a matter of individual choice. Some members choose to devote many hours to chapter, regional, and/or national activities; others may elect to not participate at all. Phi Theta Kappa requires only that a member maintain a certain cumulative grade point average to maintain member status.

Benefits of membership outlined in the Phi Theta Kappa (2010b) *Member Benefits Brochure* include:

1. Transfer scholarships: Members may apply for more than \$37 million in transfer scholarships provided exclusively to Phi Theta Kappa members by more than 700 senior institutions.
2. CollegeFish.org enrollment: Members have free access to Phi Theta Kappa's online transfer tool. Members can research colleges, learn about transfer scholarships, management transfer dates and deadlines, and communicate with 4-year college representatives to ensure a smooth transfer to a 4-year college.
3. Membership credentials: A membership pin, certificate, and identification card.
4. Graduation regalia: Phi Theta Kappa honors stole, tassel, and additional graduation regalia may be purchased and worn at college commencement exercises, contingent on college policy.
5. Gold Diploma seal: The Phi Theta Kappa diploma seal may be affixed to the member's community college diploma to denote membership.
6. Transcript notation. Membership may be noted on the community college transcripts, contingent on college policy.
7. Letters of recommendation: Letters of recommendation from headquarters may be requested and sent to college admissions or potential employers.

8. Career resource center: The career resource center located within Phi Theta Kappa headquarters provides members with career trends, research, tips, and tools for navigating the job market.
9. Civil service jobs benefit: Members applying for GS5 federal jobs who completed a baccalaureate degree with superior academic achievement, as defined by the Federal Office of Personnel Management, would be upgraded to a GS7 classification, meaning an increase in starting salary over the GS5 grade.

Determining the impact Phi Theta Kappa membership has on the level of student engagement is one area that warrants closer examination. The goal of this research project was to study the role Phi Theta Kappa membership has on the student engagement level of Iowa and Texas community college students. Although Phi Theta Kappa promotes four hallmarks—scholarship, service, leadership, and fellowship—this study focused on identifying and comparing the levels of student engagement for the activities associated with the hallmarks of scholarship and service.

### **Student Engagement**

A number of theories have attempted to adequately explain student achievement. Student effort and student engagement level are two terms that are often used when discussing factors that affect student success. Studies focusing on measuring the quality of undergraduate education based upon the students' experiences and self-analysis of their own effort level have found a strong correlation exists between effort level and the quality of education received (Astin, 1993; Pace, 1981). An examination of current research focusing on the effort level college students demonstrate during their academic experiences support the theory that active involvement in the learning process is a key indicator of academic

achievement (Astin, 1984; Kuh, Pace, & Vesper, 1987; Pace, 1981, 1990; Pascarella, 1997; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Tinto & Russo, 1994).

The student engagement theory resulted from the works of Astin (1984, 1985), Chickering & Gamson (1987), Pace (1981, 1984, 1986), Kuh and his colleagues (Kuh et al., 1981, 1989), and Tinto and Russo (1994) and is supported by the findings of the American Council on Education (2002) and the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE; 2006). McClenney (2004) described the student engagement theory as focusing on students becoming actively involved in the learning process and the strong correlation between student engagement and academic persistence. Pace (1984), Tinto (1993), and Astin (1984) have each developed theories focusing on the investment of the student as it relates to time and energy spent on the college experience. Each one of their theories will be discussed and their findings reviewed.

Pace's (1981, 1984, 1986, 1990) studies using the College Student Experiences questionnaire focused on measuring the quality of undergraduate education based upon the students' experiences and self-analysis of the level of their college engagement. Pace (1981, 1984, 1986, 1990) found a strong positive correlation between effort level and the quality of education students perceive they have received. In essence, Pace (1981, 1984, 1986, 1990) contended that the scope of the effort can be used to judge the quality of the educational experience. The results from the 1979 and 1980 data sets found that, overall, small schools scored higher than did larger schools in quality effort. In general, higher scores were found in young female students, residential students, students with a B+ or higher GPA, and students spending 40 or more hours per week on academic activities. Pace's (1981) research was conducted at 34 colleges and universities, all of which were 4-year higher education

institutions. Some of the student characteristics that were found by Pace (1981, 1984, 1986, 1990) to predict a high quality educational experience are in direct contradiction to the majority of community college student attributes. The majority of community college students commute to school, are nontraditional in age, and have family and work commitments that prevent them from having time to spend 40 or more hours per week on academic activities. The validity of Pace's (1981, 1984, 1986, 1990) research as it related to community colleges is uncertain. Another factor that was not addressed in his research was the enrollment status of the students in regards to part-time or full-time enrollment. An additional component missing from Pace's (1981, 1984, 1986, 1990) conclusions were data indicating degree completion rates for the students studied.

Astin (1984) proposed his student involvement theory based upon 20 years of research on student development. Astin's (1984) theory is based upon the amount of energy the student devotes to the academic experience. The primary focus is on linking the frequency of student-faculty interactions to students' satisfaction with their college experience. The theory of student involvement connects behavior to student motivation. It seems logical to assume high student involvement in the learning process would correlate highly positive with student success and persistence. This theory contends that educators should focus more on motivating the students to devote more time and energy to the learning process. Most of Astin's (1984) data used to support his theory were gathered from studies conducted at 4-year institutions. However, a longitudinal study focusing on student dropouts was conducted in 1975 that included data on the community college student. This study generalized that community colleges are places where minimal faculty and student involvement occurs.

Tinto's (1993) student integration model divides students' experiences into academic integration and social integration. For this model, academic integration is measured by grades or other indications of academic achievement. Social integration is measured by such factors as interaction with faculty and participation in extracurricular activities. Tinto contended that both academic and social integration should be developed within an institution for the comprehensive college experience. The concepts of academic and social integration are difficult to both define and measure. Tinto's research indicates a positive correlation between academic and social integration with persistence for 4-year college students. Residential, full-time students certainly have a greater opportunity to become involved socially with events and activities at the college. This is not the case for part-time, commuter students who probably also are working 10 or more hours a week and trying to raise a family. Time is a critical commodity for the community college student. Balancing external commitments and distractions against academic pursuits is highly challenging. With 80% of all community college students employed while also attending college, understanding the role student integration plays into academic success and persistence is clearly a challenge faced by higher education and policymakers.

Although there are clearly potential obstacles to increasing student integration at the community level experience, Tinto and Russo (1994) affirmed that community colleges have recognized and encouraged both academic and social integration into their college environment. Part of the focus is on using collaborative learning strategies to engage students in the learning process. Bragg (2001) explained that integration techniques may include experiential, hands-on learning; service learning; and cooperative arrangements as part of the academic experience. Incorporating academic and social integration activities into

the learning process strengthens students' commitments to both their institution and personal goals (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

The social integration component of Tinto's (1993) theory is the most difficult to relate to student success. Bragg's (2001) study indicates that the social environment may not have as much impact on community college students as on 4-year students. Rendón (1994) found that if a concentrated effort is made to integrate minority students into the social and academic life of college, an increase in academic success occurs. Rendón described minority students as underprepared and lacking in self-confidence. This description can also be used to describe many community college students. With this in mind, academic and social integration at the 2-year college level should benefit the majority of community college students.

The Community College Leadership Program at the University of Texas at Austin has developed a national survey instrument, the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE), to capture the experiences and activities of students attending community colleges. Data obtained from the CCSSE instrument are intended to be used as a tool for improving teaching and learning by assessing the extent to which students are engaging in good educational practices at community and technical colleges. The student engagement theory posed by McClenney (2004) has emerged from the research conducted by the Community College Leadership Program. This theory contends that active student involvement, referred to as student engagement, is a key predictor of student learning and persistence.

Given the evidence that engagement is important for student success, the message for community college educators is that this engagement will not happen by accident.



Engagement must be fostered through intentional design by syllabi, in-and out-of-class assignments, assessments, and other educational experiences. (McClenney, 2007, p. 143).

McClenney's (2004, 2007) premise that educators should focus on learning and effort agrees with the research completed by both Astin (1984, 1985, 1993) and Tinto (1993). All three theorized that student success is related to involvement and satisfaction with the educational experience. Establishing a challenging atmosphere centered on learning reflects the principal reason higher education exists. The student engagement theory presents the student-faculty interaction as a critical component to student success. McClenney and Peterson (2006) described the benefits of establishing a personal connection with faculty members to increase students' commitment to the college and also to improve academic focus. Rendón (1994) also described the value of developing meaningful relationships with faculty members. Nora and Rendón (1998) claimed that the faculty are primarily responsible for the overall academic quality of the programming that determines student success. What is not clear in their analysis is whether academic quality refers specifically to engaging students more completely in the learning process or if academic quality refers more to incorporating a multitude of proven instructional strategies that support student development.

Astin's (1985) theory of involvement proposes that student learning is a function of a student's level of academic and social involvement within the institutional environment. Phi Theta Kappa programming integrates experiences that focus on developing leadership skills, academic ability, and service learning through the sponsorship of extracurricular and co-curricular activities. Every member of Phi Theta Kappa has an equal opportunity to participate in these activities. Opportunities are also often made available to the entire

student population. “Phi Theta Kappa programs foster an educationally powerful environment for intellectual growth and challenge, as well as opportunities for leadership development and service” (Phi Theta Kappa, 2010b, ¶1).

Student involvement and student engagement can be interpreted many different ways. They both can be broadly described as consisting of all activities associated with the college experience. This can encompass curricular, extracurricular, co-curricular, campus life, and even campus work experience. Studies have supported the idea that involvement in student organizations contributes to the overall development of the student in the areas of: leadership skills, commitment to civic responsibility, multicultural awareness, and personal values (Astin, 1999; Cress, Astin, Zimmerman-Oster, & Burkhardt, 2001; Ferrari, Athy, Moriarity, & Appleby, 2006). Additionally, Cousineau and Landon (1989) contended that academic skills and satisfaction are affected positively by increased involvement in college life. Cress et al. (2001) found that students undergo positive personal changes through involvement in leadership programs.

A multitude of variables can be associated with the concept of student engagement. In studies focused on using students’ self-analysis of their effort level and educational experiences in higher education, a strong correlation was found to exist between effort level and the quality of the education students perceived they had received (Pace, 1981, 1986). Additionally, students self-report as learning more when they spend more time studying (Astin, 1993). Zhao and Kuh (2004) found that more engaged students actively participate in various out-of-class activities. Variables that may be used to quantitatively measure student engagement based on student behavior include: time spent preparing for class, participation

level during class discussions, level of interaction with an instructor outside of the classroom, and participation level in college-sponsored activities and organizations.

Astin (1984) contended that every institutional policy and practice can affect the way students spend their time and energy. Students who participate in honors programs gain substantially in interpersonal self-esteem, intellectual self-esteem, and artistic interests. German (1996) found that a positive relationship exists between honor students and the level of participation in co-curricular activities. The majority of the identified co-curricular activities involved academic integration and service learning. Ferrari et al. (2006) also determined student involvement as an academic leader has positive engagement effects equally for male and female students.

### **Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE)**

The CCSSE was established in 2001 as a project of the Community College Leadership Program at the University of Texas at Austin. The intention behind the creation of CCSSE was to produce new information about the community college experience and to provide valuable data to participating institutions. This data could then be used to introduce changes in community college programming in an effort to improve student learning and retention. CCSSE's survey instrument, the Community College Student Report, provides information on student engagement. The survey asks questions that assess institutional practices and student behaviors that are correlated highly with student learning and student retention.

CCSSE works in partnership with NSSE, a survey that focuses on 4-year colleges and universities. CCSSE and NSSE both focus on institutional practices and student behaviors that promote student engagement. "Both survey instruments are specifically designed to

assess the extent to which students are engaged in empirically derived good educational practices and what they gain from their college experience” (Kuh, 2001, p. 2).

CCSSE has identified five groups of conceptually related survey items or benchmarks that address key areas of student engagement: active and collaborative learning, student effort, academic challenge, student–faculty interaction, and support for learners. The survey instrument contains 38 questions that are associated with the five benchmarks.

A review of the findings reported by CCSSE over the last eight years includes the following:

- Students learn more when they are actively involved in their educational experience.
- Students’ behaviors contribute significantly to their learning and the likelihood that they will attain their educational goals.
- The more interaction the students have with faculty and other students, the more likely they are to learn effectively and persist towards their educational goals.
- Students perform better and are more satisfied at colleges that are committed to their success and cultivate positive working and social relationships among different groups on campus. (Center for Community College Student Engagement [CCCSE], 2010; CCSSE, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009)

The CCSSE can be used to identify areas in which improvements can and should be made. Educational success and college completion is essential to the future of the United States. The *2010–2011 Occupational Outlook Handbook* released by the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2010) projected that 75% of future positions are expected to require at least some

type of certification or licensure, and professions that require a bachelor's degree are projected to grow nearly twice as fast as the national average.

In spring 2010, the Center for Community College Student Engagement joined five other national college organizations in signing the Community College Completion Commitment—a pledge to promote and support the goal that U.S. community colleges will produce 50% more students with high-quality degrees and certificates by 2020, while also increasing access and quality. The Center's partners in this pledge are the Associate for Community College Trustees, the League for Innovation in the Community College, the National Institute for Staff and Organizational Development, and Phi Theta Kappa. (CCCSE, 2010, p. 3)

The number of community colleges participating in the annual survey has increased dramatically since CCSSE's inception. The most recent 2010 CCSSE cohort comprised any community college or associate's degree-granting institution who participated in the CCSSE survey in 2008, 2009, or 2010. For a college that participated more than once in the 3-year period, only the most current data were used. The group referred to as the 2010 CCSSE cohort consists of approximately 403,428 students at 658 colleges in 47 states, Alberta, British Columbia, Nova Scotia, Ontario, Quebec, Bermuda, Northern Marianas, and the Marshall Islands.

### **Iowa and Texas Community Colleges and State Demographics**

According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2010), in 2009 the state of Iowa had a population of 3,007,856, a 2.8% increase since 2000. The state of Iowa supports 15 community colleges. Each community college is governed by locally elected boards of directors that consist of from five to nine members who are elected to terms of 4 years. Each

community college offers a comprehensive educational program. According to an annual report released by the Iowa Department of Education (2010), the 15 Iowa community colleges collectively enrolled 106,597 students for the fall 2010 semester. This compares to 100,736 students enrolled during the fall 2009 semester.

The U.S. Census Bureau (2010) reported the total population for the state of Texas in 2009 to be 24,782,302, an 18.8% increase since 2000. The Texas Association of Community Colleges recognizes 50 community college districts in the state of Texas. Each Texas community college district has its own governing board, and statewide coordination is provided by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board. The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (2010) reported 757,899 students enrolled in Texas community colleges during the fall 2010 semester. This compares to 692,845 students enrolled during the fall 2009 semester.

Comparison of the ethnic backgrounds for each state's population showed quite a bit of disparity. The state of Texas has much more racial diversity than does the state of Iowa. Table 2.1 shows the ethnic background percentages for each state compared to that of the whole country.

### **Summary of Literature Review**

An extensive amount of research exists on the levels of student achievement, interaction, and quality of effort for the American college student. More recently, similar research targeting students attending community colleges has been completed. Although the demographic profile of the community college student is much different than that of a student attending a 4-year college or university, it is apparent that the level of student engagement is still an important factor when predicting academic success and persistence.

Table 2.1

*Ethnic Background by Percentage*

Ethnic background	Iowa	Texas	United States
White, not Hispanic	89.80	46.60	65.10
Black	2.80	12.00	12.90
American Indian and Alaska Native	0.40	0.80	1.00
Asian	1.70	3.60	4.60
Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander	0.10	0.10	0.20
Hispanic or Latino	4.50	36.90	15.80
Other	0.70	0.00	0.40

Phi Theta Kappa is an academic honor society focused on recognizing scholarly achievement of community college students. Unlike other academic honor societies, Phi Theta Kappa also intentionally promotes civic and social interaction by establishing comprehensive development programs dedicated to fostering an atmosphere of high student engagement.

Astin's (1984) theory of involvement contends that a positive correlation exists between student involvement and learning. The student engagement model links active student involvement in meaningful educational experiences and activities to student persistence and ultimately academic success. Research supports the theory that the more engaged a student is in the learning process, the more committed the student is to the educational experience. Analyzing the factors that impact student engagement is a complex process but one that is critical to developing procedures and policies best suited to helping students succeed.

Active student involvement is a key predictor of student success. The goal of higher education is to establish a challenging atmosphere focused on student learning and development. Understanding the relationship between membership in Phi Theta Kappa and the level of student engagement is one small piece that will add to the existing research on the American college student.



## CHAPTER THREE. METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

### Overview

The purpose of this study was to conduct a statistical analysis and describe the extent to which membership in the Iowa and Texas Regions of Phi Theta Kappa affects the student engagement level of community college students. Research methods used in this study were completed in an effort to quantitatively analyze the relationships that exist between membership in Phi Theta Kappa and the student behaviors most closely associated with student engagement. This chapter explains the research design of this study. In addition, a description of the population sample, instrumentation, data analysis, and anticipated ethical issues related to the study are presented.

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What are the background characteristics of Phi Theta Kappa members currently enrolled in Iowa and Texas community colleges?
2. How do the social background characteristics of current Iowa and Texas Phi Theta Kappa members differ? Specifically, are there statistically significant differences among current Iowa and Texas Phi Theta Kappa members by gender, age, ethnic background, marital status, and college enrolment by Phi Theta Kappa region?
3. How do current Iowa and Texas Phi Theta Kappa members compare when measuring participation in Phi Theta Kappa sponsored events?
4. Are there statistically significant differences in the number and types of student engagement activities and experiences between the members of the two Phi Theta Kappa regions?

5. How do the descriptive statistics of the sample group compare to the 2010 CCSSE cohort?

### **Research Design**

In order to address the research questions posed, the researcher created an electronic survey instrument distributed to the target population. The purpose of conducting a survey was to generalize from a sample of students to the population of community college students who are members of Phi Theta Kappa. Inferences were made about the characteristics, attitudes, and behaviors of the larger population. Because this study drew from previous works in the area of student engagement and effort, an original survey instrument, the Phi Theta Kappa Member Survey, was developed in order to collect new data from the target population. The survey was cross-sectional in nature, as the information was collected at one point in time.

The Iowa region initially was selected for the project as the researcher was familiar with the Iowa region and served as a Phi Theta Kappa advisor there for 7 years, including the time frame when Iowa was recognized as an independent region making Iowa the youngest Phi Theta Kappa region. The research project was expanded to include the Texas region upon the recommendation of Phi Theta Kappa headquarters as it was the first region to be established. Phi Theta Kappa headquarters was interested in seeing a comparison of data for the oldest and youngest regions. In a pilot study conducted in the spring semester of the 2007–2008 academic year, the Phi Theta Kappa Member Survey instrument was distributed to 1,477 Phi Theta Kappa members attending an Iowa community college.

### **Population and Sample**

The unit of analysis for the study was the population of students who were members of the Iowa and Texas Regions of Phi Theta Kappa during the spring semester of the 2009–2010 academic year. The Iowa region was selected for a pilot project as the researcher was familiar with the Iowa region and served as a Phi Theta Kappa advisor for 7 years, which included the time frame when Iowa was recognized as an independent region making Iowa the youngest Phi Theta Kappa region. The research project was expanded to include the Texas region upon the recommendation of Phi Theta Kappa headquarters as it was the first region to be established. Phi Theta Kappa headquarters was interested in seeing a comparison of the data for the oldest and youngest regions.

Phi Theta Kappa headquarters granted written support of the study. A copy of the letter of support from the Executive Director of Phi Theta Kappa is provided in Appendix B. In order to distribute the survey, staff members at Phi Theta Kappa headquarters were directed to provide the principal investigator the contact information required, in this the e-mail addresses of all Phi Theta Kappa members inducted into Iowa and Texas chapters who were also currently enrolled in a community college. A total of 16,786 e-mail addresses were provided. Nine of the e-mails were returned as undeliverable; thus the final population included 16,777 members who were eligible to complete the survey.

A total of 1,838 participants logged in to the survey. Of the 1,838 participants who accessed the survey, only 822 completed all or part of the questions and clicked on the submission button at the end of the survey. Comparing the final sample size to the number of members eligible to complete the survey yielded a response rate of 4.9%.

### **Instrumentation**

Data were collected using an original electronic survey instrument, the Phi Theta Kappa Member Survey. This 27-item survey was designed following a review of past survey instruments used to study areas of college student engagement, including: the College Student Experience Questionnaire developed by Pace in 1984, the NSSE developed by the Center for Postsecondary Research in the School of Education at Indiana University, and the CCSSE developed by the Community College Leadership Program at the University of Texas. The Phi Theta Kappa Member Survey incorporates items paraphrased or drawn directly from the 2009 and 2010 CCSSE instrument. This was intentional to allow comparisons to be made between the CCSSE results and the Phi Theta Kappa results. The types of inventories utilized to measure the items on the survey instrument are dichotomous responses (i.e., “yes” and “no”), numerical scales, a Likert-type rating scale (i.e. “*never*” to “*very often*”), and open-ended answers. Drafts of the Phi Theta Kappa survey instrument were reviewed and constructive comments received by two leading researchers in community college leadership: Dr. Larry Ebbers and Dr. Frankie Santos Laanan, both of whom are affiliated with Iowa State University. Recommendations made by the internal experts were incorporated into the final draft of the Phi Theta Kappa Member Survey instrument prior to e-mail distribution of the survey. See Appendix C for a complete copy of the survey instrument.

The 27-item survey instrument is organized into four sections: (a) background information, (b) high school experience, (c) community college experience, and (d) Phi Theta Kappa experience. The background information section of the questionnaire asks current Iowa and Texas Phi Theta Kappa members to provide demographic information, including:

gender, age, marital status, race/ethnicity, current GPA, degree aspiration, and miles traveled to attend college. The high school experience section focuses on collecting data that were useful in comparing and contrasting the academic and social engagement levels of current Iowa and Texas Phi Theta Kappa members. This section involves questions pertaining to the amount of time spent each week in high school studying, socializing, working, participating in sports, and performing volunteer service. The community college experience section focuses on asking specific questions pertaining to academic, civic, and social engagement levels during the current academic school year. The questions pertaining to academic experiences included specific questions for activities both within and outside of the classroom. The purpose of the Phi Theta Kappa experience section was to provide information pertaining to the level of participation in Phi Theta Kappa-sponsored activities at the local, regional, and national level.

### **Data Collection Procedures**

In order to address the research questions, an electronic questionnaire was created that served as the instrument used in the survey of the target population. Qualtrics Survey Software was used to create, distribute, collect and aggregate the data collected for this research. The target population was contacted electronically using the e-mail addresses provided by Phi Theta Kappa headquarters. In an effort to facilitate a high response rate, potential subjects received two e-mails inviting them to participate in the survey. The electronic survey instrument was e-mailed to 16,777 Phi Theta Kappa members of the Iowa and Texas regions on April 18, 2010. The body of the e-mail explained the purpose of the research project, assured the recipients the project was endorsed by Phi Theta Kappa headquarters, and invited the Phi Theta Kappa members to participate in the study. The e-

mail also included instructions on how to access the survey and contact information for the principal investigator. Three weeks after the initial contact, May 9, 2010, a second e-mail was sent to each subject reminding them to complete the survey.

The data provided by the respondents were gathered in an electronic format. Web-based surveys are used increasingly as a means for collecting data. Comparing the response rate for mail and Web surveys indicates a higher response rate exists for electronic surveys that include multiple e-mail contacts (Mehta & Sivadas, 1995). Kaplowitz, Hadlock, and Levine (1995) found electronic surveys in which respondents received only an e-mail containing a link to the Web survey resulted in a 20% response rate.

For this study, returned surveys were scored as responses if they were completed in full or partially. A total of 1,838 people who accessed the survey, and 822 surveys were completed or partially completed, for a response rate of 4.9%. The response rate was calculated as the number of fully or partially completed surveys returned divided by the number of surveys that were sent out and not returned as undeliverable. Survey data were then exported from the Qualtrics Survey Software to Statistical Package for Social Science® (SPSS) software and stored on a secure server.

This survey was conducted in conjunction with the Office of Community College Research and Policy (OCCRP) at Iowa State University, Ames. The OCCRP provided support for the development of the survey, training on the survey software, and the Qualtrics Survey Software used to create and execute the survey. Since the completion of this study, all data is being stored on a secure server in the OCCRP. The principal investigator did not intend to use all of the information collected in this survey for this study, rather only those

variables pertinent to exploring the research questions below. The remaining data is being stored in the OCCRP for future research.

### **Data Analysis**

Descriptive and inferential statistics were compiled to answer the research questions. The unit of analysis was the population of students who are members of Phi Theta Kappa in the Iowa and Texas regions during the spring semester of 2010. Descriptive statistics are provided for all respondents. For all inferential statistical tests, the sample was later weighted to balance the response rate of the respective regions. Weighted response rates can be used to estimate the proportion of the survey population for which useable information is available (Ferguson, Cohen, & Rosen, 2003). The weighting of the survey took the following form:

$$R_i = \frac{\text{Proportion of population}}{\text{Proportion of respondents}}$$

where  $R$  is equal to Phi Theta Kappa region and representative of the weight to be applied to each respondent (Bartels, 1997). The remainder of the analyses focused on differences between the regionally based groups of Iowa and Texas.

The Statistical Package for Social Science<sup>®</sup> (SPSS) for Windows<sup>®</sup> software was used to execute the statistical analysis for the study. SPSS is a comprehensive system for analyzing data and provides information on trends, descriptive statistics, and complex statistical analyses. A descriptive statistical analysis including frequency counts was employed to answer research questions 1 and 5. Research questions 2–4 were addressed by using inferential statistical analyses after first weighting the response rates. Chi-square analyses and independent samples  $t$ -tests were then executed for the mutually exclusive

comparative groups of Phi Theta Kappa region, Iowa and Texas. Chi-square analyses were completed to describe differences within the group, specifically gender, age, ethnic background, marital status, and college enrollment by Phi Theta Kappa region. An independent samples *t*-test compares sample means to determine whether “there is sufficient evidence to infer that the means of the corresponding population distributions also differ” (George & Mallery, 2006, p. 134). A descriptive statistical analysis including frequency counts was employed to answer research question 5. Comparison of the sample group to the 2010 CCSSE cohort group was limited to using only frequency counts and percent values as the only CCSSE data available to the researcher was in the form of frequency counts of the responses for each survey question.

### **Preliminary Studies/Pilot Tests**

A pilot study was completed August 2008. Using data from the pilot study, analysis focused on comparing the behavior levels associated with academic and social engagement for the sample group. The unit of analysis was the population of students attending a community college in the state of Iowa in the spring semester of 2008.

The pilot study consisted of 1,477 Phi Theta Kappa members attending a community college in the state of Iowa during the spring semester of the 2007–2008 academic year. One hundred forty-nine members responded to the electronic survey, which represents a 10% response rate of the population surveyed. The response rate was calculated by the number of surveys returned divided by the number of surveys that were sent out and not returned as undeliverable. Returned surveys were scored as responses if they were completed in full or partially.



The student population who completed the Phi Theta Kappa Member Survey in the spring semester of 2008 were primarily traditional-age community college students, and the overwhelming majority were White/Caucasian. Results indicate Iowa Phi Theta Kappa members were academically engaged and academically successful. They reported an increase in effort as it relates to studying and completing homework in college compared to high school. Classroom participation was strong, but students spent little time on the community college campus. High academic engagement levels relating to the classroom experience existed, but limited involvement occurred outside the classroom. Additionally, the majority (69%) spent at least some time volunteering or engaging in community work but not in a service learning capacity.

Results indicated that, although Phi Theta Kappa members in the Iowa Region were academically engaged in the classroom experience, they spent little time working with other students on class-related projects or assignments outside of class. They also did not appear to be active participants in the extracurricular events sponsored by Phi Theta Kappa or to spend much time on the community college campus outside of the classroom experience.

The pilot study described above was completed to meet the requirements of a capstone research project for Iowa State University's doctoral program. The results from the pilot study were not used in the researcher's final research project.

### **Ethical Issues**

Prior to collection of data, an application for approval to conduct research involving human subjects was made to the Office for Responsible Research at Iowa State University. The study received a full review by the Institutional Review Board, which subsequently granted approval for the project on December 17, 2009. Following a meeting with the

doctoral program of study committee, a request was submitted to modify the research project to incorporate revisions to four of the survey questions; the request to modify the research project was approved on April 12, 2010. A copy of the original IRB approval and subsequent modified project approval are provided in Appendix D.

In an effort to avoid any confusion or ethical conflicts of interest, all contacts with the respective Phi Theta Kappa members were made as an Iowa State University doctoral student. Endorsement of the study by Phi Theta Kappa International headquarters was explained in the e-mail provided to each Phi Theta Kappa member. The electronic survey was sent to Iowa and Texas members identified by Phi Theta Kappa headquarters. Participation in this study was voluntary, and willingness to participate had no effect on the current status of membership in Phi Theta Kappa.

To ensure the integrity of the survey and its results, both the survey and the data were stored on a secure server. The data set continues to be stored on a secure server in the Office of Community College Research and Policy for future research.

## CHAPTER FOUR. RESULTS

This chapter provides a comprehensive overview of the results of this study. The chapter is organized into five sections. The first section reports the demographic characteristics of Phi Theta Kappa members attending Iowa and Texas community colleges. The next section reports the differences in the social background characteristics of the members of the two Phi Theta Kappa regions according to gender, age, ethnic background, marital status, and college enrollment status. The third section depicts the participation levels of Iowa and Texas Phi Theta Kappa members in Phi Theta Kappa-sponsored events. The fourth section presents the comparisons of the academic and social engagement levels of the sample group. The last section presents a frequency comparison of the sample group to the 2010 CCSSE cohort.

### **Demographic Characteristics of Iowa and Texas Phi Theta Kappa Members**

In an effort to answer Research Question 1—What are the background characteristics of Phi Theta Kappa members currently enrolled in Iowa and Texas community colleges?—frequency analyses were conducted to gain a better understanding of the general demographics of the 822 Phi Theta Kappa members who completed the survey in full or partially. It should be noted that the Iowa State University IRB required respondents to have the option of not answering questions, thus sample sizes differ on the variables reported in this study.

Participants were asked to provided demographic information about their gender, age, ethnicity, marital status, Phi Theta Kappa region (Iowa or Texas), and college enrollment status (full-time or part-time). A detailed description of the demographic information provided by the participants is presented in Table 4.1. By gender, a majority (69%,  $n = 564$ )

of the Phi Theta Kappa members in this study were female; males represented 31% ( $n = 248$ ). In comparison, the AACC (2010) reported that nationally 56% of all U.S. community college students were female and 44% were male. Additionally, 35% of the sample group were between the ages of 18 and 24, and 68% were enrolled as full-time students.

Of the 805 Phi Theta Kappa members responding to the question pertaining to race/ethnic background, 66% ( $n = 534$ ) were White/Non Hispanic. Among other race/ethnicity groups, the next largest group was Hispanic/Latino/Spanish at 18% ( $n = 141$ ), followed by African American/Black at 6% ( $n = 51$ ), Asian American/Asian Pacific Islander at 5% ( $n = 42$ ), American Indian or other Native American at 1% ( $n = 10$ ); other racial groups comprised the final 3% ( $n = 26$ ).

Of the 813 participants responding to the question regarding marital status, 60% ( $n = 492$ ) reported being unmarried and 40% ( $n = 321$ ) reported being married.

Respondents were asked in which Phi Theta Kappa region they held membership. Of the 816 respondents, the majority (83%,  $n = 678$ ) reported being a member of the Texas region. Only 17% ( $n = 138$ ) responded as being a member of the Iowa region.

Among the 657 Phi Theta Kappa members responding to the question regarding college enrollment status, 68% ( $n = 444$ ) reported as attending a community college full time. Approximately one third (32%,  $n = 207$ ) reported attending a community college as a part-time student.

Table 4.1

*Descriptive Statistics of Iowa and Texas Phi Theta Kappa Members (N = 822)*

Variable	Iowa		Texas		Total	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
<b>Gender (N = 812)</b>						
Male	40	29	208	31	248	31
Female	97	71	467	69	564	69
Total	137	100	675	100	812	100
<b>Age (N = 816)</b>						
18–19	4	3	28	4	32	4
20–21	28	20	105	16	133	16
22–24	18	13	107	16	125	15
25–29	17	12	107	16	124	15
30–39	32	23	112	17	144	18
40–49	18	13	122	18	140	17
50–64	21	15	91	13	112	14
65+	0	0	6	1	6	1
Total	138	99	678	101	816	100
<b>Race/ethnic background (N = 805)</b>						
American Indian/other Native American	2	1	8	1	10	1
Asian American/Asian Pacific Islander	2	1	40	6	42	5
White/Non-Hispanic	125	91	409	61	534	66
Native Hawaiian	0	0	1	0	1	0
African American/Black	1	1	50	8	51	6
Hispanic/Latino/Spanish	6	4	135	20	141	18
Other	1	1	25	4	26	3
Total	137	99	668	100	805	99
<b>Marital status (N = 813)</b>						
Married	54	39	267	40	321	40
Unmarried	84	61	408	60	492	60
Total	138	100	675	100	813	100
<b>Enrollment status (N = 651)</b>						
Full-time	82	71	362	68	444	68
Part-time	33	29	174	32	207	32
Total	115	100	536	100	651	100

### Differences in Social Background Characteristics by Region

In an effort to answer Research Question 2—How do the social background characteristics of current Iowa and Texas Phi Theta Kappa members differ? Specifically, are there statistically significant differences among current Iowa and Texas Phi Theta Kappa members by gender, age, ethnic background, marital status, and college enrollments by Phi Theta Kappa region?—chi-square ( $\chi^2$ ) analyses were conducted. The results are depicted using two by two contingency tables. The  $H_0$  (the null hypotheses) associated with these tests are that Phi Theta Kappa region and  $X$ , with  $X$  being the demographic comparison group(s), are independent of each other. The null hypothesis is the same for all of the chi-square analyses. Simply stated, the null hypothesis asks, is there a relationship between Phi Theta Kappa region and the social demographic information collected? The results of the chi square analyses are found in Table 4.2.

The Phi Theta Kappa members did not differ much by age. In fact, for all except one of the estimated cross tabulations none of the two by two contingency tables produced results even approaching traditional levels of significance. For the age range 18–19 there were 32.6 weighted respondents that fit the demographic category,  $\chi^2(1, N = 816) = 0.46, p = .49$  (see Table 4.2). The results of the chi square analysis, presented in Table 4.2, revealed only one statistically significant result: 23% of Iowa Phi Theta Kappa members fit the demographic age range 30–39 compared to only 16.5% of Texas Phi Theta Kappa members,  $\chi^2(1, N = 816) = 3.50, p \leq .10$ , therefore  $H_0$  was rejected and one can conclude that these measures are associated with each other.

See Table 4.2 for the relationship between gender and Phi Theta Kappa region. The resulting analysis supports the conclusion that no relationship exists. Therefore, the null hypothesis is not rejected,  $\chi^2(1, N = 812) = 0.14, p = .71$ .

The analysis of the relationship between race/ethnicity and Phi Theta Kappa region supports the conclusion that a relationship exists between Phi Theta Kappa region and race/ethnicity (see Table 4.2). Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected. Asian Americans comprised 1.5% of Iowa Phi Theta Kappa members but 6% of Texas Phi Theta Kappa members,  $\chi^2(1, N = 804.6) = 4.71, p \leq .05$ . African Americans comprised 0.7% of Iowa Phi Theta Kappa members but 7.5% of Texas Phi Theta Kappa members,  $\chi^2(1, N = 804.6) = 8.76, p \leq .05$ . Latinos/as comprised 4.4% of Iowa Phi Theta Kappa members but 20.2% of Texas Phi Theta Kappa members,  $\chi^2(1, N = 804.6) = 19.84, p \leq .01$ . However, the trend reversed where Caucasian's were concerned. Fully, 91.2% of Iowa Phi Theta Kappa members were Caucasian but only 61.2% of Texas Phi Theta Kappa members were Caucasian,  $\chi^2(1, N = 804.6) = 46.63, p \leq .01$ .

Table 4.2 also displays the relationship between marital status and Phi Theta Kappa region. The analysis leads to the conclusion that no relationship exists between Phi Theta Kappa region and marital status. Therefore, the null hypothesis is not rejected,  $\chi^2(1, N = 813) = 0.01, p = .87$ .

The relationship between enrollment status and Phi Theta Kappa region is also shown in Table 4.2. The analysis leads to the conclusion that no relationship exists. Therefore, the null hypothesis is not rejected,  $\chi^2(1, N = 649) = 0.61, p = .43$ .

Table 4.2

*Crosstabulation of Phi Theta Kappa Region and Demographic Variables*

Variable	Phi Theta Kappa region		n	$\chi^2$
	Iowa	Texas		
Gender (N = 812)				
Male	26.7	222.0	248.8	
Female	64.8	498.5	563.3	0.14
Age (N = 816)				
18–19	2.7	29.9	32.6	0.46
20–21	18.7	112.1	130.8	1.93
22–24	12.0	114.2	126.3	0.66
25–29	11.4	114.2	125.6	1.06
30–39	21.4	119.6	140.9	3.50*
40–49	12.0	130.2	142.3	1.97
50–64	14.0	97.1	111.2	0.57
65+	0.0	6.4	6.4	N/A
Race/ethnic background (N = 805)				
American Indian/other Native American	1.3	8.5	9.9	N/A
Asian American/Asian Pacific Islander	1.3	42.7	44.04	4.71**
White/Non-Hispanic	83.5	436.6	520.1	46.63***
Native Hawaiian	0.0	1.1	1.1	N/A
African American/Black	0.7	53.37	54.1	8.76***
Hispanic/Latino/Spanish	4.0	144.1	148.1	19.84***
Other	0.7	26.7	27.4	N/A
Marital status (N = 813)				
Married	36.0	285.0	321	
Unmarried	56.1	435.5	492	0.01
Enrollment status (N = 649)				
Full-time	54.8	386.4	441.2	
Part-time	22.1	187.7	207.8	0.61

*Note.* Analysis based on weighted sample estimates. N/A = expected cell count threshold of 5 not met.

\* $p < .10$ . \*\* $p \leq .05$ . \*\*\* $p \leq .01$ .



### Participation in Phi Theta Kappa-Sponsored Events

In an effort to address Research Question 3—How do current Iowa and Texas Phi Theta Kappa members compare when measuring participation in Phi Theta Kappa events?—independent samples *t*-tests were completed to determine if the means of the two samples, Iowa and Texas regional members, differ significantly for the variables associated with Phi Theta Kappa sponsored events. Although, by and large, what Phi Theta Kappa members from the two different regions reported when it came to the number of times they participated in Phi Theta Kappa sponsored events was relatively the same, there were a couple of statistical differences within the two regions that should be noted regarding the level of participation at specific Phi Theta Kappa-sponsored events.

The survey asked respondents how often they had participated in various Phi Theta Kappa sponsored events including: satellite seminars, international service programs, American Cancer Society events, regional conventions, regional leadership conferences, regional officer training, international conventions, international leadership training, Nota Bene Anthology, Honors Case Study Challenge, Project Graduation, and Voice Your Vote Project. The response choices were on a six-point scale where 1 = *None*, 2 = *1–3*, 3 = *4–6*, 4 = *7–10*, and 5 = *more than 10*.

Iowa Phi Theta Kappa members reported that on average they did not participate in Phi Theta Kappa-sponsored events. Regarding Phi Theta Kappa satellite seminars, the 66.2 Iowa Phi Theta Kappa members reported that they did not participate ( $M = 1.11$ ,  $SE = 0.05$ ), and the 506 Texas Phi Theta Kappa members reported that they participated in satellite seminars at about the same rate ( $M = 1.13$ ,  $SE = 0.02$ ; see Table 4.3). This average rate of participation continued for Iowa and Texas Phi Theta Kappa members for other Phi Theta

Kappa events. Phi Theta Kappa members from both Iowa ( $M = 1.23$ ,  $SE = 0.06$ ) and Texas ( $M = 1.15$ ,  $SE = 0.02$ ) reported that they did not participate in the international service program. Furthermore, Phi Theta Kappa members from Iowa ( $M = 1.23$ ,  $SE = 0.05$ ) and from Texas ( $M = 1.19$ ,  $SE = 0.02$ ) reported that they did not participated in American Cancer Society events nor did they participate in the regional conventions (Iowa,  $M = 1.17$ ,  $SE = 0.04$ ; Texas,  $M = 1.13$ ,  $SE = 0.02$ ). However, though on average both Iowa and Texas Phi Theta Kappa members reported that they did not participate in any Phi Theta Kappa-sponsored events some differences between the regionally based groups means were detected.

Table 4.3

*Phi Theta Kappa Participation Activities Means for Iowa and Texas Phi Theta Kappa Regions*

	<u>Iowa region</u>		<u>Texas region</u>		<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SE</i>		
Phi Theta Kappa-sponsored events						
Satellite seminar	1.11	0.05	1.13	0.02	-0.54	572
International Service program	1.23	0.06	1.15	0.02	1.18	572
American Cancer Society events	1.23	0.05	1.19	0.02	0.70	572
Regional convention	1.17	0.04	1.13	0.02	0.87	572
Regional leadership conference	1.14	0.04	1.12	0.02	0.45	572
Regional officer training	1.07	0.03	1.05	0.01	0.61	572
International convention	1.19	0.05	1.09	0.02	1.79*	572
International leadership training	1.03	0.02	1.05	0.01	-1.11	572
Honors Case Study Challenge	1.09	0.03	1.10	0.02	-0.39	572
Project Graduation	1.12	0.03	1.13	0.02	-0.30	572
Voice Your Vote Project	1.05	0.02	1.10	0.02	-1.84*	572
Nota Bene Anthology	1.00	0.00	1.03	0.01	-2.94***	572

*Note.* Analysis based on weighted sample estimates.

\* $p < .10$ . \*\*\* $p \leq .01$ .

Though the average level of participation in three of the Phi Theta Kappa events was zero, the means for both groups (Iowa and Texas) were statistically different from each other for three events: the international convention, Voice Your Vote Project, and Note Bene Anthology. For the international convention and Voice Your Vote Project, the mean scores of the 66.2 Iowa Phi Theta Kappa respondents for the two projects ( $M = 1.19$ ,  $SE = 0.05$  and  $M = 1.05$ ,  $SE = 0.02$ , respectively) and the mean scores of the 506 Texas Phi Theta Kappa respondents for the two projects ( $M = 1.09$ ,  $SE = 0.02$  and  $M = 1.10$ ,  $SE = 0.02$ , respectively) were statistically different from each other,  $t(572) = 1.79$ ,  $p < .10$ . Furthermore, although both the Iowa ( $M = 1.00$ ,  $SE = 0.0$ ) and Texas ( $M = 1.03$ ,  $SE = 0.01$ ) regions' members reported no participation in the Note Bene Anthology, the two groups means differed significantly,  $t(572) = -2.94$ ,  $p < .01$ .

### **Student Engagement Levels for Iowa and Texas Members**

In an effort to address Research Question 4—Are there statistically significant differences in the number and types of student engagement activities and experiences between the members of the two Phi Theta Kappa regions?—chi-square analyses and independent samples  $t$ -tests were completed for both high school experiences and community college experiences, which reflect high school and college academic performance, time spent commuting to the college campus, and academic participation within and outside of the college classroom.

#### **High School Experiences**

Results shown in Table 4.4 display the students' high school academic performance as measured by cumulative high school GPA cross-tabulated with Phi Theta Kappa region.

The resulting analysis leads to the conclusion that a relationship exists for all aspects of high

school GPA and Phi Theta Kappa region except for the 4.0 GPA range,  $\chi^2(1, N = 708) = 0.21, p = .64$  and the GPA range of 3.75–3.9,  $\chi^2(1, N = 708) = 0.01, p = .96$ . Therefore, for these two high school GPA ranges the null hypothesis is not rejected and the conclusion is that no relationship exists between Phi Theta Kappa region and the aforementioned high school GPA ranges. However, for the remainder of the high school GPA ranges the null hypothesis must be rejected and conclusion is that an association between the measures does exist. The percentage of Iowa and Texas Phi Theta Kappa members who had a high school GPA of 3.5–3.74 was 14.8% and 21.8%, respectively,  $\chi^2(1, N = 708) = 3.07, p \leq .1$ . The percentage of Iowa and Texas Phi Theta Kappa members who had a high school GPA of 3.25–3.49 was 11.5% and 17.7%, respectively,  $\chi^2(1, N = 708) = 2.83, p \leq .1$ . The percentage of Iowa and Texas Phi Theta Kappa members who had a high school GPA of less than 3.25 was 37.7% and 22.8%, respectively,  $\chi^2(1, N = 708) = 11.83, p \leq .01$ .

Table 4.4

*Crosstabulation of Phi Theta Kappa Region and High School GPA (N = 708)*

High school GPA	Phi Theta Kappa region		n	$\chi^2$
	Iowa	Texas		
4.0	6.7	59.8	66.5	0.21
3.75 – 3.9	22.7	176.1	198.9	0.01
3.5 – 3.74	12.0	136.6	148.7	3.07*
3.25 – 3.49	9.4	111.0	120.4	2.83*
Less than 3.25	30.7	143.0	173.8	11.83***

*Note.* Analysis based on weighted sample estimates.

\* $p < .10$ . \*\*\* $p \leq .01$ .

There were minimal statistical differences between the two Phi Theta Kappa regions comparing time spent doing various activities during the last year in high school. Phi Theta Kappa members overall reported relatively the same amount of time they spent on a variety of activities, from studying to playing video games. The survey asked respondents how much time during their last year in high school was spent in hours during a typical week doing each of the following activities: studying, working, exercising, partying, socializing, volunteering, participating in student clubs, watching television, and playing video games. The response choices were on a six-point scale, where 1 = *No hours*, 2 = *1–2 hours*, 3 = *3–5 hours*, 4 = *6–10 hours*, 5 = *11–15 hours*, and 6 = *more than 15 hours*.

Iowa Phi Theta Kappa members reported that they spent on average between 3 and 5 hours a week studying during their last year in high school ( $M = 3.08$ ,  $SE = 0.13$ ). Texas Phi Theta Kappa members reported that they spent about the same time on average studying during their last year in high school ( $M = 3.23$ ,  $SE = 0.06$ ); see Table 4.5. Comparatively, there were few statistical differences between the two Phi Theta Kappa regions for the amount of time Phi Theta Kappa members spent doing any of the 10 activities identified, with one exception. When it came to the amount of time spent attending religious services or activities, the 68.2 weighted Iowa Phi Theta Kappa members reported spending on average between 0 and 2 hours a week attending or participating in religious services or activities ( $M = 1.98$ ,  $SE = 0.08$ ). The 513.5 weighted Texas respondents reported spending at least 1 to 2 hours a week on the same kind of activities ( $M = 2.18$ ,  $SE = 0.05$ ). Where time spent on religious activities is concerned there was a significant effect for region,  $t(582) = -2.04$ ,  $p < .05$ , with Texas Phi Theta Kappa members having spent more time on religious activities.

Table 4.5

*High School Activities Means for Iowa and Texas Phi Theta Kappa Regions*

	Iowa region		Texas region		<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SE</i>		
Studying	3.08	0.13	3.23	0.06	-0.97	580
Working	3.96	0.20	3.82	0.10	0.57	580
Exercising	2.93	0.15	2.86	0.07	0.41	580
Partying	1.96	0.15	2.05	0.06	-0.55	580
Socializing	3.39	0.13	3.30	0.06	0.56	580
Volunteering	1.82	0.10	1.97	0.05	-1.21	580
Student Clubs	2.20	0.12	2.12	0.05	0.57	580
Watching TV	3.05	0.13	3.00	0.05	0.36	580
Video Games	1.67	0.11	1.83	0.06	-1.29	580
Religious activities	1.98	0.08	2.18	0.05	-2.04**	580

*Note.* Weighted counts reported; analysis based on weighted sample estimates.

\*\* $p \leq .05$ .

### Community College Academic Performance

Table 4.6 displays the relationship between college GPA and Phi Theta Kappa region. The resulting analysis leads to the conclusion that no relationship exists between Phi Theta Kappa region and college GPA. No association was found among any of the five college GPA categories. For the college GPA of 4.0,  $\chi^2(1, N = 714.7) = 1.33, p = .25$ . Therefore the null hypothesis is not rejected and the conclusion is that there is no difference between college GPA based on Phi Theta Kappa region.

Table 4.6

*Crosstabulation of Phi Theta Kappa Region and Current College GPA (N = 714.7)*

College GPA	Phi Theta Kappa region		<i>n</i>	$\chi^2$
	Iowa	Texas		
4.0	12.0	124.9	136.9	1.33
3.75–3.9	34.1	269.0	303.1	0.01
3.5–3.74	22.7	162.3	185.0	0.47
3.25–3.49	8.7	59.8	68.5	0.25
Less than 3.25	2.0	19.2	21.2	N/A

*Note.* Analysis based on weighted sample estimates. N/A = expected cell count threshold of 5 not met.

### Community College Experiences

Questions on the survey asked respondents how much time was spent during an average 7-day week doing each of the following activities: studying, working (for pay), participating in college-sponsored activities, and commuting. The response choices were a six-point scale where 1 = *no hours*; 2 = *1–2 hours*; 3 = *3–5 hours*; 4 = *6–10 hours*; 5 = *11–15 hours* and 6 = *more than 15 hours*. Statistical differences were identified between the two regions regarding time spent doing various activities during a typical week (see Table 4.7). Phi Theta Kappa members from both regions spent relatively the same amount of time on studying or working for pay but different amounts of time participating in college-sponsored activities or commuting to and from classes. Iowa Phi Theta Kappa members reported that they spent on average between 6 and 10 hours a week studying during a typical week ( $M = 3.65$ ,  $SE = 0.12$ ); Texas Phi Theta Kappa members reported that they spent about the same time on average studying during a typical week ( $M = 3.57$ ,  $SE = 0.06$ ; see Table 4.7).

Furthermore, Iowa Phi Theta Kappa members reported that they spent between 6 and 10

hours working ( $M = 3.52$ ,  $SE = 0.19$ ), which was similar to the reported number of hours spent working by Texas Phi Theta Kappa members ( $M = 3.60$ ,  $SE = 0.09$ ). However, even though the means of the 68.5 Iowa Phi Theta Kappa respondents ( $M = 1.53$ ,  $SE = 0.06$ ) and the means of the 493.2 Texas Phi Theta Kappa respondents ( $M = 1.68$ ,  $SE = 0.04$ ) fall between the none and 1 to 2 hour ranges for hours spent on participating in college-sponsored activities, they are statistically different,  $t(562) = -1.81$ ,  $p < .10$ . Additionally, though the mean of the 68.5 Iowa Phi Theta Kappa respondents ( $M = 2.01$ ,  $SE = 0.06$ ) and the mean of the 493.2 Texas Phi Theta Kappa respondents ( $M = 2.29$ ,  $SE = 0.04$ ) fall between the 1 to 2 and 3 to 5 hour ranges for hours spent commuting to and from classes they are statistically different,  $t(562) = -3.96$ ,  $p < .01$ .

Table 4.7

*Hours Spent in a Typical Week Means for Iowa and Texas Phi Theta Kappa Regions*

Activities	Iowa region		Texas region		<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SE</i>		
Studying	3.65	0.12	3.57	0.06	0.56	560
Working	3.52	0.19	3.60	0.09	-0.37	560
College-sponsored activities	1.53	0.06	1.68	0.04	-1.81*	560
Commuting	2.01	0.06	2.29	0.04	-3.96***	560

*Note.* Weighted counts reported.

\* $p < .10$ . \*\*\* $p \leq .01$ .

Table 4.8 shows the relationship between the number of miles commuted to college and Phi Theta Kappa region. For every category, except one, no statistical significance exists. The resulting analysis leads to the conclusion that no relationship exists between Phi Theta Kappa region and number of miles commuted to college.



For the commute distance of 6 to 10 miles, the results were statistically insignificant,  $\chi^2(1, N = 693.6) = 0.71, p = .40$ . These results are typical of the cross-tabulations for this variable. In general, there is no relationship between Phi Theta Kappa region and miles commuted. However, for respondents who had to commute 101 to 500 miles to attend college the null hypothesis is rejected and the conclusion is that these measures are associated with each other. Over four percent (4.3%) of Iowa Phi Theta Kappa members reported commuting 101 to 500 miles, , but only 0.87% of Texas Phi Theta Kappa members reported being so encumbered,  $\chi^2(1, N = 693.6) = 8.05, p \leq .01$ .

Table 4.8

*Crosstabulation of Phi Theta Kappa Region and Miles Commuted (N = 693.6)*

Miles commuted	Phi Theta Kappa region		<i>n</i>	$\chi^2$
	Iowa	Texas		
5 miles or less	23.4	181.5	204.9	0.02
6–10 miles	17.4	161.2	178.6	0.71
11–50 miles	28.7	235.9	264.7	0.06
51–100 miles	4.7	32.0	36.7	0.13
101–500 miles	3.3	5.3	8.7	8.05***

*Note.* Analysis based on weighted sample estimates.

\*\*\* $p \leq .01$ .

### **Community College Student Engagement Variables**

Table 4.9 depicts the results from the inferential statistics completed on 13 independent variables identified as behaviors associated with student engagement cross-tabulated by region. The 13 independent variables represent specific questions included in the Phi Theta Kappa Member survey instrument. The independent variables used in the

analysis included: (a) asked questions in class, (b) participated in class discussions, (c) made a class presentation, (d) came to class without completing an assignment or reading, (e) worked with other students on projects during class, (f) worked with classmates outside of class to prepare class assignments, (g) participated in community based project as part of a course, (h) discussed grade or assignments with instructor, (i) talked about career plans with instructor or advisor, (j) discussed readings or assignments with an instructor outside of class, (k) discussed readings or classes with others outside of class, (l) participated in community service linked to coursework, and (m) participated in volunteer or community service work. The scale used to measure each of the 13 variables consisted of four choices based upon the students' experiences at their college during the current school year. The choices consisted of: 1 = *very often*, 2 = *often*, 3 = *sometimes*, 4 = *rarely*, 5 = *never*.

Data consistently indicated that the Phi Theta Kappa members were very engaged in the classroom experience. However, there were few statistical differences between the regions for how often they participated in college life and activities during the current school year. Phi Theta Kappa members overall gave relatively the same response when it came to how often they asked questions in class to the amount of participation in extramural activities (see Table 4.9).

Both Iowa Phi Theta Kappa members and Texas Phi Theta Kappa members reported that on average they asked questions in class often ( $M = 2.05$ ,  $SE = 0.10$ ;  $M = 2.10$ ,  $SE = 0.05$ ; respectively). Overall, there were few statistical differences between Phi Theta Kappa regions for how often members participated in class or in campus life. However, when it came to group projects outside of class, 67.5 weighted Iowa Phi Theta Kappa members reported that on average they sometimes participated in group projects outside of class with a

Table 4.9

*Current Academic Year College Activities Means for Iowa and Texas Phi Theta Kappa Regions*

Activities	Iowa region		Texas region		<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SE</i>		
Asked question in class	2.05	0.10	2.10	0.05	-0.39	578
Participated in class	1.73	0.09	1.80	0.04	-0.69	578
Unprepared for class	2.52	0.11	2.55	0.05	-0.26	578
Class presentation	3.94	0.08	3.86	0.04	0.83	578
Group projects (in class)	2.70	0.10	2.65	0.04	0.46	578
Group projects (outside of class)	3.18	0.10	2.95	0.05	1.97**	578
Community project (for class)	3.96	0.11	3.82	0.05	1.05	578
Discussed grades w/instructor	2.54	0.10	2.59	0.04	-0.46	578
Discussed career w/advisor	3.09	0.11	3.01	0.05	0.68	578
Discussed course w/instructor (outside of class)	3.25	0.10	3.19	0.05	0.51	578
Discussed course w/others (outside of class)	2.49	0.10	2.53	0.05	-0.37	578
Service learning	3.77	0.12	3.81	0.06	-0.33	578
Service work	3.21	0.12	3.19	0.06	0.18	578
College team	4.73	0.07	4.65	0.04	0.91	578
Extramural activities	4.74	0.07	4.60	0.04	1.62	578

*Note.* Weighted counts reported; analysis based on weighted sample estimates.

\*\* $p \leq .05$ .

mean score of 3.18 ( $SE = 0.10$ ). On the other hand 512.4 weighted Texas Phi Theta Kappa members reported that they sometimes participated in group projects outside of class with a mean score of 2.95 ( $SE = 0.05$ ). Though the differences in the means are slight they seem to indicate that Texas Phi Theta Kappa member work on group projects outside of class more often than do their Iowa counterparts. Additionally, there was a significant effect for region

when analyzing how often Phi Theta Kappa members worked on group projects outside of class,  $t(580) = 1.97, p < .05$ ), with Texas Phi Theta Kappa members having lower scores (meaning they did it more often) on how often they participated in group projects outside of class.

### **2010 CCSSE Cohort Compared to Phi Theta Kappa Sample**

In an effort to address Research Question 5—How do the descriptive statistics of the sample group compare to the 2010 CCSSE cohort?—frequency analyses were conducted to determine if there were any similarities between the results from the sample group and the 2010 CCSSE cohort.

When possible, comparisons were made between the sample group and the 2010 CCSSE cohort results (see Table 4.10). The most recent 2010 CCSSE cohort comprised any community college or associate's degree-granting institution who participated in the CCSSE survey in 2008, 2009, or 2010. For a college that participated more than once in the 3-year period, only the most current data were used. The group referred to as the 2010 CCSSE cohort consists of approximately 403,428 students at 658 colleges in 47 states, Alberta, British Columbia, Nova Scotia, Ontario, Quebec, Bermuda, Northern Marianas, and the Marshall Islands. The list of Iowa and Texas community colleges who participated in the 2008, 2009, or 2010 CCSSE survey is shown in Appendix E. However, the data couldn't be sorted a manner that isolated student responses by state, so student responses for only the Iowa and Texas colleges couldn't be selected. Sixteen specific survey items matched the questions asked in both the CCSSE instrument and this study's Phi Theta Kappa Member Survey instrument. In the Phi Theta Kappa data set, 67% of the students very often or often asked questions during class. Comparison to the 2010 CCSSE results found that Phi Theta

Kappa members' results were very similar; 65% of the CCSSE respondents asking questions in class often or very often. In addition, 43% of the Phi Theta Kappa members reported working often or very often with other student on projects during class compared to 47% of the CCSSE cohort. However, some disparity was noticed between the two groups. When asked how often they made a class presentation, 47% of the Phi Theta Kappa members very often or often made a class presentation compared to just 28% of the CCSSE cohort.

The engagement level outside of class varied a great deal between the Phi Theta Kappa group and the CCSSE cohort. Only 7% of the CCSSE cohort reported participating often or very often in a community-based project as part of a regular course compared to 16% of the Phi Theta Kappa group. In fact, 77% of the CCSSE group reported as never participating in a community-based project as part of a regular course compared to 41% of the Phi Theta Kappa respondents. Results also varied between the two groups in their responses to how often they worked with other students outside of class to prepare class assignments. Only 23% of the CCSSE cohort reported working very often or often with other students outside of class compared to 34% of the Phi Theta Kappa group.

Both the CCSSE cohort and the Phi Theta Kappa group reported a high level of engagement with their instructors and/or advisors. When asked how often they had discussed grades or assignments with an instructor, 47% of both groups selected often or very often. Additionally, when asked how often they talked about career plans with an instructor or advisor, both groups had a high response rate. Seventy percent of CCSSE cohort selected the choices of sometimes, often, or very often compared to 65% of the Phi Theta Kappa group.

Table 4.10

*Comparison of the 2010 CCSSE Cohort<sup>a</sup> and Phi Theta Kappa Group*

Variables	CCSSE cohort <sup>a</sup> %	Phi Theta Kappa group %
Gender		
Male	42	31
Female	58	69
College enrollment		
Part time	27	32
Full time	73	68
Age		
18–24 years of age	67	35
Ethnic background		
American Indian or other Native American	2	1
Asian American/Asian/Pacific Islander	4	5
White/Caucasian	63	66
African American/Black	11	6
Hispanic/Latino/Spanish	11	18
Native Hawaiian	0	0
Other	4	3
Marital status		
Married	23	40
Academic performance (response = often or very often)		
Asked questions in class	65	67
Make class presentation	28	47
Worked with other students during class	47	43
Worked with other students outside of class	23	34
Community-based project as part of class	7	16
Discussed grades and/or assignments with instructor	47	47
Talked about career plans with instructor and/or advisor	26	35
Discussed readings with others outside of class	50	50
Hours spent studying or doing homework		
None	2	1
1–5	42	21
6–10	30	29
11–20	18	26
21–30	6	13
30+	3	10
Family supportive of college attendance		
Extremely	67	70
Quite a bit	20	17
Somewhat	10	8
Not very	3	4

Table 4.10 (continued)

Variables	CCSSE cohort <sup>a</sup> %	Phi Theta Kappa group %
Plan on transferring to 4-year college or university		
Yes	50	80
No	50	20

<sup>a</sup>2010 CCSSE cohort is defined as a 3-year cohort (2008, 2009, 2010) of participating community colleges. Only the data from the most recent year of participation was used.

## CHAPTER FIVE. SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

### Summary

This research assists in providing insight into the effect Phi Theta Kappa membership has on the level of student engagement of community college students and builds upon previous work in an effort to describe more accurately the current student engagement level of Phi Theta Kappa members. This study focused on comparing the levels of specific behaviors associated with academic and social engagement of the sample groups in an effort to determine the level of student engagement for Phi Theta Kappa members. Although Phi Theta Kappa promotes four hallmarks—scholarship, service, leadership, and fellowship—this study focused on identifying and comparing the levels of student engagement for the activities associated with the hallmarks of scholarship and service.

The Phi Theta Kappa Survey instrument was created to collect data from current community college students who were also members of Phi Theta Kappa in the Iowa and Texas regions during the spring semester of the 2009–2010 academic year. A total of 822 participants, community college students in the states of Iowa and Texas, represented the sample group, reflecting a 4.9% response rate. Participants were asked to respond to 27 questions so that inferences could be made about the background characteristics, high school experiences, community college experiences, and Phi Theta Kappa experiences of the total population of Phi Theta Kappa members. After the data were cleaned, descriptive statistics and inferential analyses were conducted in an effort to gain new insight into the variables affecting student engagement, particularly for Phi Theta Kappa members.

These findings and conclusions are intended to provide awareness and inform policymakers, administrators, and individuals who work directly with Phi Theta Kappa



members about factors that affect the student engagement level of Phi Theta Kappa members. The data collected by this study provide opportunities for future research. This chapter is organized into five sections: discussion, limitations, recommendations for practice, implications for future research, and final thoughts and reflections.

### **Discussion**

To establish a general demographic profile of the 822 participants, the study began with an exploration of background characteristics of the participants. Results indicated the sample population consisted primarily of White/Caucasian female students between the ages of 25 and 29 who were attending college full time. According to the AACC (2010), the average age of the community college student is 28. In terms of gender, results from the survey indicated nearly 66% of the Phi Theta Kappa members during the spring semester of the 2009–2010 academic year were female and were members of the Texas region of Phi Theta Kappa. Phi Theta Kappa headquarters (2010a) has reported that nearly 75% of their members are female. The AACC (2010) reported that as of December 2010, female students accounted for 56% of all community college students. The CCSSE 2010 cohort identified 58% of the respondents as female and consisted predominately of White, female students who were attending college full time. One significant difference between the demographics of the CCSSE cohort and the sample group of this study was the age of the students. For the CCSSE cohort, 67% of the students were between the ages of 18 and 24 compared to 35% of the Phi Theta Kappa sample group.

Although the overall sample group was predominantly White/Caucasian, the Texas region displayed higher percentages of specific ethnic groups than did the Iowa region.

Latinos/as comprised 20.2% of the Texas region sample but only 4.4% of the Iowa region

sample. African Americans comprised 7.5% of the Texas Phi Theta Kappa region sample compared to only 0.7% of the Iowa Phi Theta Kappa region. Additionally, Asian Americans comprised 6% of those from the Texas region compared to only 1.5% of the Iowa region sample. Rendón (1994) described minority students as underprepared and lacking in self-confidence and contended that if a concentrated effort is made to integrate minority students into the social and academic life of college, an increase in academic success occurs. This premise can be expanded to include all community college students.

Phi Theta Kappa members self-reported as having high academic achievement and spending a substantial number of hours per week studying. A review of the academic participation level both within and outside the classroom experience supports the research completed by the Community College Leadership Program at the University of Texas at Austin through the use of the CCSSE instrument, which indicated that community college students spend little time on the college campus outside of class. Just over half (53%) of the Phi Theta Kappa sample group reported spending less than 4 hours per week on campus outside of class. Additionally, 55% of the respondents reported commuting 10 miles or less to class, and over one third (38%) were commuting 11 to 50 miles to attend class.

Research completed by Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) found that incorporating social and academic integration activities into the learning process strengthens students' commitment to personal goals. Tinto (1993) contended that both academic and social integration activities need to be developed in order to provide a comprehensive college experience for students. On the basis of the premise that the more actively involved the students are in all aspects of the college experience the more likely they are to persist and

achieve their educational goal, it is important to find a way to increase the interaction level of community college students outside of the classroom experience.

Data consistently indicated that the sample group was very engaged in the classroom. When possible, comparisons were made between the sample group and the 2010 CCSSE cohort results, as depicted in Table 4.10. Some of the Phi Theta Kappa Member Survey questions were intentionally created to match particular CCSSE questions. Of the Phi Theta Kappa data set, 67% of the students very often or often asked questions during class which compared to 65% of the 2010 CCSSE cohort. Additionally, 78% of the Phi Theta Kappa members reported participating very often or often in class discussions, and 26% responded as always coming prepared to class. When asked if they had made a class presentation during the current school year, 47% of the Phi Theta Kappa members reported as having done so either often or very often compared to 28% of the 2010 CCSSE cohort.

When asked about working with classmates on projects or assignments during and outside of class, 43% of the Phi Theta Kappa members and 47% of the 2010 CCSSE cohort responded as having very often or often worked with others on projects during class. When asked if they had worked with classmates outside of class, 34% of the Phi Theta Kappa member and 23% of the CCSSE cohort responded very often or often to the question.

Results from the survey questions pertaining to community service indicated that the majority of Phi Theta Kappa members did not participate in community service on a regular basis. Only 16% of the sample group responded as often or very often when asked if they had participated in a community-based project as part of the course. The largest percentage of the sample group (41%) reported never participating in a community-based project as part of a course. Additionally, 42% of the sample group reported as never participating in

community service linked to coursework, and only 32% of the participants responded very often or often when asked if they had participated in any volunteer or community service work during the current school year.

Analysis of the questions involving engagement with an instructor outside of the classroom also indicated that little involvement occurs outside of the classroom experience. Only 35% of the Phi Theta Kappa members reported talking about career plans with an instructor very often or often. Although 26% reported discussing reading or assignments with an instructor outside of class, 15% reported never having done so.

Results indicate the level of participation in chapter-sponsored events is not very high. Although 23% of the members reported attending one to three chapter meetings for the spring semester, 82% did not know the star level status of their local chapter. In addition, only 9% of the sample participated in the honors case study events recommended by Phi Theta Kappa headquarters. Specific information pertaining to the number of Phi Theta Kappa-sponsored activities attended by current Iowa and Texas members are as follows: 85% of the students had not participated in any American Cancer Society events, 88% had not participated in the international service program titled Operation Green, 88% had never attended a regional convention, 90% had never attended an international convention, 91% had not participated in the honors case study challenge, 94% had not participated in the Voice Your Voice project, and 91% of the students had not participated in Project Graduation activities. Opportunities clearly existed for Phi Theta Kappa members to become involved in a variety of civic activities, but the overwhelming majority chose not to do so. These numbers are disturbing and one has to wonder what can be done to promote the participation level in each co-curricular program.

Results indicate that, although Phi Theta Kappa members in the Iowa and Texas regions are academically engaged in the classroom experience, they spend little time on the college campus outside of class. They also do not appear to be active participants in the co-curricular events sponsored by Phi Theta Kappa or to spend much time on the community college campus outside of the classroom experience. These findings mirror the findings of the CCSSE. According to the CCSSE 2010 report, only 23% of the 2010 CCSSE cohort reported working very often or often with other students outside of class, and only 7% responded as very often or often participating on a community-based project as part of a class. Additionally, 82% reported as never participating in a college-sponsored activity and 70% selected the response never when asked how often they had worked with instructors on activities other than coursework (CCCSE, 2010).

The population completing the Phi Theta Kappa Member Survey in the spring semester of 2010 were community college students between the ages of 25 and 29 ( $M = 5.36$ ,  $SD = 1.8$ ) and the overwhelming majority were White/Caucasian who are unmarried. Phi Theta Kappa members are academically engaged and academically successful. The average college GPA ranged between 3.79 and 3.9 ( $M = 2.35$ ,  $SD = 0.99$ ). Additionally, 68% were enrolled in college full time and 80% were planning on transferring to a 4-year educational institution. They reported an increase in effort as it relates to studying and completing homework in college compared to high school. Classroom participation was strong but students spent little time on the community college campus. High academic engagement levels relating to the classroom experience existed, but limited involvement occurred outside the classroom. Additionally, the majority (78%) spent at least some time volunteering or engaging in community work, with 59% also engaging in a service learning capacity as part

of a course. However, it should be noted that 41% and 42%, respectively, reported never participating in a community service as part of a course or service linked to coursework.

Although it is disappointing to see the low level of social and civic engagement that occurs outside of the classroom, it should not be a surprise to anyone. Community college students typically commute to school and are trying to balance their college responsibilities with a multitude of other responsibilities. “As different as they are, most community college students share one attribute: limited time. Most are attending classes and studying while working: Caring for dependents; and juggling personal, academic, and financial challenges” (CCCSE, 2010, p. 5). American community colleges are serving more students each year, but given the scope of commitments and responsibilities of the community college students, they spend little time on the college campus outside of class. Astin (1984) contended that institutional policy affects the way students’ spend their time and energy. McClenney (2007) stated that student engagement is critical to student success, but it will not happen by accident. Phi Theta Kappa has a long history of integrating experiences fostering academic and social interactions within the community college experience but struggles to get society members to become actively involved. Should community colleges consider incorporating Phi Theta Kappa activities into the college programming and mandating student participation? Integrating Phi Theta Kappa activities into the college experience may be beneficial and could result in an increase in the student engagement level of all community college students.

The research literature provides evidence that students learn more effectively and are more likely to complete their program of study when they are more engaged in the learning process. Finding a way to integrate learning beyond just the classroom experience is a

responsibility of all of higher education that must be taken seriously. Creating an environment supporting lifelong learning must be the goal. In order to prepare students for the global marketplace, learning cannot be just about earning good grades and attending class. It must include understanding that civic engagement is critical to creating educated citizens best prepared to meet the demands of the future.

### **Limitations**

There are several limitations that should be addressed when considering the results and findings of this study:

1. The data gathering procedures entailed utilizing an electronic survey instrument; the willingness, interest and ability of the individuals to respond to all questions and to respond accurately could not be controlled by the principal investigator.
2. This study is limited in that it does not provide information about the Phi Theta Kappa members who chose not to respond to the Phi Theta Kappa Member Survey.
3. This study is limited to the Phi Theta Kappa members who self-reported on the Phi Theta Kappa Member Survey.
4. The researcher was unable to verify the validity of the e-mail addresses provided by Phi Theta Kappa headquarters or to determine if all e-mail addresses belonged to current community college students.
5. The study relied on voluntary participation from those who received the survey via e-mail.
6. This study was cross-sectional in nature and did not allow the researcher to measure change over time.

### **Recommendations for Practice**

In an effort to increase the student engagement level outside of the typical classroom experience, community colleges should integrate Phi Theta Kappa-sponsored activities and programs focusing on service learning and civic engagement into the academic curriculum and mandate participation by all students. The results provided by CCSSE clearly indicate community college students are not civically engaged, and because research has linked the quality of the educational experience to out-of-class experiences (Astin, 1999, McClenney, 2004, Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, Tinto, 1993), an effort should be made to incorporate activities into the curriculum that deliberately foster civic engagement. There is a wealth of information and suggestions available from Phi Theta Kappa headquarters and other organizations committed to promoting civic involvement, and these organizations should be used as a resource. Unfortunately, the results from this study indicate that, although Phi Theta Members were provided multiple opportunities to become actively involved in a variety of civic activities, the majority chose not to do so. Integrating Phi Theta Kappa programs and activities into the co-curricular programming at the community colleges may result in a higher participation level in co-curricular activities, which would be beneficial to both the community college and Phi Theta Kappa.

Phi Theta Kappa advisors/chapter leaders should meet with community college faculty on a regular basis to provide them with materials and information created by Phi Theta Kappa headquarters containing information specific to the programs created or sponsored by Phi Theta Kappa. Additionally, the chapter advisors should work closely with the community college faculty to develop activities that would benefit all students and also meet the four hallmarks of Phi Theta Kappa: scholarship, service, fellowship, and leadership.



Working collaboratively with faculty to identify and develop activities that are beneficial to all students and can also be embedded into the curriculum can help build a culture focused on student success. “Colleges that more successfully engage faculty get more traction on their success agenda than do colleges where faculty engagement is limited” (CCCSE, 2010, p. 20).

Additionally, it is recommended that Phi Theta Kappa should consider working closely with the Community College Leadership Program to consider the merits of adding questions to the CCSSE survey instrument specific to Phi Theta Kappa members. All Phi Theta Kappa members are community college students. Asking whether or not the student is a member of Phi Theta Kappa allows researchers to sort the data for Phi Theta Kappa membership, which could then be used to make comparisons between Phi Theta Kappa members and nonmembers. If the student responds “yes” to the membership question, a subset of questions pertaining to the level of involvement in Phi Theta Kappa events could also be included in the survey instrument. The data gathered by adding these questions could be beneficial to community college leaders and Phi Theta Kappa headquarters to develop future programming.

Tinto’s (1993) research found social integration to be an important indicator of academic achievement. Participation in extracurricular activities is one way to measure the level of social integration. Bragg (2001) suggested that service learning, hands-on learning, and cooperative arrangements are all methods that can be used to integrate social learning into the educational experience. Phi Theta Kappa creates a support network and establishes a sense of community within the college experience. “Activities that emphasize scholarship, leadership, service, and fellowship provide the foundation, knowledge, and practical experience necessary to become a servant leader and a valued, engaged global citizen” (Phi

Theta Kappa, 2010a, ¶1). Incorporating academic and social integration activities into the learning process strengthens students' commitments to both their institution and personal goals (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). The focus on student development, including personal leadership skills, assists in preparing graduates with the knowledge and skills necessary to cope with emerging national and global issues.

### **Implications for Future Research**

This research has supported the assumption held by many people that Phi Theta Kappa members are highly engaged in the classroom and are active learners but are not highly active in social or civic activities outside of the classroom experience. Broadening this study to include a qualitative component to determine the reasons why Phi Theta Kappa members do not participate in co-curricular activities and suggestions they have that would result in an increase in participation would be useful information.

Students who have earned 12 hours of college credit and have a cumulative GPA of 3.5 are invited to join Phi Theta Kappa. As not all eligible students choose to join the honor society, it would be useful to conduct a qualitative study interviewing students to determine the reasons they are self-selecting not to join Phi Theta Kappa.

A future research opportunity exists to study the impact web-based courses have on the student engagement level of the community college student. The percentage of community college students enrolling in web-based degree programs compared to face-to-face programs at both the community college level and the 4-year institution level is increasing and expected to continue to grow. A study of the service learning and civic engagement components found in each type of instructional delivery mechanism would provide educational researchers with valuable data.

Because 80% of the sample group in this study indicated a plan to transfer to a 4-year educational institution, an additional research opportunity exists to compare the retention and persistence rates as measured by graduation rates of Phi Theta Kappa member versus nonmember community college students who have transferred to a 4-year institution. One additional variable that could be considered is the length of time required by both groups before earning a baccalaureate degree.

### **Final Thoughts**

The findings from this study will be shared with Phi Theta Kappa headquarters in the hope that the results will generate discussion and dialogue on how to effectively increase the student engagement level of not only Phi Theta Kappa members but also community college students in general. Findings from this study raised numerous questions for researchers to consider. College administrators should use these findings to evaluate and possibly revise their practices as they relate to student engagement activities both within and outside the classroom.

An effort must be made to intentionally change the educational experience for the community college student to consist of more enrichment activities that force students to become actively involved in a comprehensive educational experience. A collaborative approach to integrating the programming already developed by Phi Theta Kappa into the curriculum would not be detrimental and would most likely benefit all community college students. Phi Theta Kappa has dedicated substantial resources to developing programs that focus on integrating leadership, civic responsibility, and academic performance. The community colleges allocate a great deal of resources to determining the engagement level of their students and to develop procedures that assist students in achieving their educational

goals. It seems logical that merging the programming of Phi Theta Kappa into community college curricular and co-curricular activities would benefit both groups. The community colleges should take advantage of the expertise Phi Theta Kappa has to offer, which can assist community colleges in creating an educational experience that intentionally forces students to become fully engaged learners. This would include incorporating both civic and social engagement activities that may be in the form of service learning as well as academic experiences that may occur within the classroom or outside the classroom experience. A collaborative approach to integrating the service learning programming developed by Phi Theta Kappa into the curriculum would therefore make student engagement inescapable and assist in making the learning more relevant. These activities would not necessarily have to occur on the college campus the student attends, but could occur within the student's community.

The community colleges serve an important role in educating the citizens of the United States. Originally developed as open-admissions junior colleges who offered associate degrees and certificates in a wide area of subject areas, some states are now allowing community colleges to award baccalaureate degrees. As of 2004, eleven states have approved at least one 2-year-college baccalaureate program with more states expected to follow suit in the near future (American Association of State Colleges and Universities, 2004). The effect this will have on our nation's higher educational system and Phi Theta Kappa is unclear but should be closely examined. As more and more community colleges begin offering baccalaureate degrees, creating an institutional culture of high student engagement will become even more critical. Active involvement is the key to student success and persistence, and community colleges need to become creative at developing

academic and co-curricular programs that are not only available to all students, but are required components of the educational experience.

## APPENDIX A. PHI THETA KAPPA ORGANIZATIONAL CHART

Board of Directors – 7 members

Executive Director

50 staff members & 5 International Student Officers

29 Regions led by Regional Directors

- Alabama – 32 chapters
- Arizona – 24 chapters
- Carolinas (comprising North Carolina and South Carolina) – 80 chapters
- Colorado – 23 chapters
- Florida – 78 chapters
- Georgia – 35 chapters
- Greater Northwest (comprising Alaska, N. Idaho, Montana, Washington & Canada) – 55 chapters
- Illinois – 57 chapters
- Indiana – 25 chapters
- Iowa – 28 chapters
- Kansas – 29 chapters
- Kentucky – 20 chapters
- Michigan – 31 chapters
- Middle States Region (comprising Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey, Pennsylvania) – 75 chapters
- Minn-WI-Kota (comprising Minnesota, Wisconsin, N. Dakota, S. Dakota) – 68 chapters
- Missouri – 25 chapters
- Mississippi/Louisiana – 40 chapters
- Nebraska/Wyoming – 40 chapters
- Nevada/California – 97 chapters
- New England (comprising Connecticut, Maine, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, Vermont) – 57 chapters
- New Mexico – 18 chapters
- New York – 59 chapters
- Ohio – 37 chapters
- Oklahoma/Arkansas – 41 chapters
- Pacific (comprising Hawaii, U.S. Territories of Samoa & Guam) – 14 chapters
- Rocky Mtn-Cascade (comprising Oregon, Utah, S. Idaho) – 25 chapters
- Tennessee – 14 chapters
- Texas – 88 chapters
- Virginia (comprising Virginia & West Virginia) – 49 chapters

Regional Officers

1200 Chapters led by Chapter Advisors

Chapter Officers

**APPENDIX B. LETTER OF SUPPORT**

November 2, 2009

Ms. Marge Welch  
2344 195<sup>th</sup> Street  
Afton, IA 50830

Dear Ms. Welch,

Thank you for your request to study the level of engagement of Phi Theta Kappa members attending Iowa and Texas Community Colleges. We feel your proposed research project is very timely and could prove very useful to Phi Theta Kappa.

Our staff will be pleased to provide information, communications, and records that you need to facilitate completion of your study.

We wish you great success with your project.

Sincerely,



Rod A. Risley  
Office of the Executive Director  
Phi Theta Kappa Headquarters  
Phone: 601.984.3518  
Fax: 601.984.3544  
[rod.risley@ptk.org](mailto:rod.risley@ptk.org)

## APPENDIX C. SURVEY INSTRUMENT

### Phi Theta Kappa Member Survey

Thank you for your willingness to complete this survey.

Please answer the following questions based upon your experiences as a Phi Theta Kappa member. All information you provide will be kept completely confidential.

The purpose of this survey is to identify the levels of academic and social engagement for Phi Theta Kappa members of the Iowa and Texas Region.

The survey will take approximately 15 minutes to complete.

#### Background Information

1. How old will you be on December 31 of this year?
  - a. 15-17 years
  - b. 18-20
  - c. 21-25
  - d. 26-30
  - e. 31-35
  - f. 36-40
  - g. 41 or older
  
2. What is your gender
  - a. Male
  - b. Female
  
3. What is your racial identification?
  - a. American Indian or other Native American
  - b. Asian American/Asian/Pacific Islander
  - c. White/Caucasian
  - d. African American/Black
  - e. Hispanic/Latino/Spanish
  - f. Other
  
4. Are you married?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
  
5. In which Phi Theta Kappa region are you a member?
  - a. Iowa
  - b. Texas



6. Are you currently enrolled in a community college?
  - a. If yes, please continue on with the survey
  - b. If no, you are finished with the survey
  
7. For this current term, how would you describe your enrollment at this college?
  - a. Full-time student
  - b. Part-time student
  
8. How many miles do you drive to attend college?
  - a. 5 or less
  - b. 6-10
  - c. 11-50
  - d. 51-100
  - e. 101-500
  - f. Over 500
  
9. What was your average grade in high school
  - a. A or A+
  - b. A-
  - c. B+
  - d. B
  - e. B-
  - f. C+
  - g. C
  - h. D
  
10. What is your current cumulative GPA?
  - a. 4.0
  - b. 3.75 – 3.9
  - c. 3.5 – 3.74
  - d. 3.25 – 3.49
  - e. below 3.25
  
11. Do you plan on transferring to a 4-year college or university?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
  
12. If yes, please list the college or university you plan on transferring to. \_\_\_\_\_
  
13. Does the college or university offer a Phi Theta Kappa transfer scholarship?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No

14. What is the highest academic degree you intend to obtain
- None Certificate Diploma
  - Associate
  - Bachelor's degree
  - Master's degree
  - PhD or Ed.D
  - Medical (MD, DDS, DO, or DVM)
  - Law (JD or LLB)
  - Other

### High School Experience

15. During your last year in high school how much time did you spend (in hours) during a typical week doing each of the following

None 1-2 3-5 6-10 11-15 more than 15

- studying or doing homework
- working for pay
- exercising or playing sports
- partying
- socializing with friends
- volunteer work
- student clubs/groups
- watching television
- playing video/computer games
- attending religious services/activities

### Community College Experience

16. Did you begin college at this college or elsewhere?
- Started here
  - Started elsewhere

17. In your experiences at this college during the current school year, about how often have you done each of the following

Very often often sometimes never

#### Academic participation

- asked questions in class
- participated in class discussions
- made a class presentation
- came to class without completing readings or assignments
- worked with other students on projects during class
- worked with classmates outside of class to prepare class assignments
- participated in a community-based project as part of a course

h. discussed grades or assignments with an instructor

**Interaction outside of class**

i. talked about career plans with an instructor or advisor

j. discussed reading or assignments with an instructor outside of class

k. worked with an instructor on activities other than coursework

l. Discussed reading or classes with others outside of class (students, family members, co-workers, etc.)

m. Participated in community service linked to coursework (service learning)

**Civic Engagement**

n. Participated in volunteer or community service work

**Collegial athletic participation**

o. Participated in college team sporting events as a team member

p. Participated in extramural sporting events

18. About how many hours do you spend in a typical 7-day week doing each of the following?

None 1-5 6-10 11-20 21-30 more than 30

a. studying or preparing for class

b. working for pay

c. participating in college-sponsored activities

d. commuting to and from classes

19. How many total credit hours have you earned at this college not counting the courses you are currently taking?

a. None

b. 1-14 credit hours

c. 15-29

d. 30-44

e. 45-60

f. Over 60

20. About how many hours a week do you usually spend on the community college campus, **not counting time attending classes**?

a. None

b. 1 – 3 hours

c. 4 – 6 hours

d. 7 – 9 hours

e. 10 -12 hours

f. more than 12 hours

**Phi Theta Kappa Experiences**

21. How many chapter meetings have you attended this semester?

a. None

b. 1-3

- c. 4 – 6
- d. 7- 9
- e. more than 9

22. In your experiences as a Phi Theta Kappa member, about how often have you done each of the following

None   1-3   4-6   7-10   more than 10

- a. Participated in a satellite seminar?
- b. Participated in the International Service Program- Operation Green
- c. Participated in American Cancer Society events
- d. Attended the Regional Convention
- e. Attended the Regional Leadership Conference
- f. Attended the Regional Officer Training
- g. Attended the International Convention
- h. Attended the International Leadership Training
- i. Submitted an entry to the Nota Bene Anthology
- j. Participated in the Honors Case Study Challenge
- k. Participated in Project Graduation
- l. Participated in Voice Your Vote project

23. Which Phi Theta Kappa scholarships/awards have you received?

Yes   No

- a. Regional Leaders of Promise
- b. International Leaders of Promise
- c. New Century Scholar
- d. All State Academic Team
- e. All USA Academic Team
- f. Other. Please list

24. How long have you been a member of Phi Theta Kappa?

- a. 1<sup>st</sup> semester
- b. 2<sup>nd</sup> semester
- c. 3<sup>rd</sup> semester
- d. 4<sup>th</sup> semester
- e. 5 or more semesters

25. Select the primary reason you joined Phi Theta Kappa

- a. Transfer scholarship opportunities
- b. It is an honor to be a member
- c. Leadership opportunities available as a member
- d. May be beneficial in the future
- e. Other

26. What is the star status of your local Phi Theta Kappa Chapter?

- a. 5
- b. 4
- c. 3
- d. 2
- e. 1
- f. unknown

27. From the list below, please rank your top 4 choices of a major field of study you are most interested in completing.

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Accounting                    | <input type="checkbox"/> Information Technology       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Agricultural Sciences         | <input type="checkbox"/> Journalism/Broadcasting      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Architecture/Drafting         | <input type="checkbox"/> Languages                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Art                           | <input type="checkbox"/> Legal Services/Paralegal     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Aviation                      | <input type="checkbox"/> Library/Information Sciences |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Biological Sciences           | <input type="checkbox"/> Liberal Arts/General Studies |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Business                      | <input type="checkbox"/> Literature                   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Chemistry                     | <input type="checkbox"/> Marketing                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Chiropractor Studies          | <input type="checkbox"/> Mathematics                  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Communications                | <input type="checkbox"/> Management                   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Computer Sciences             | <input type="checkbox"/> Medical Technology           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Counseling                    | <input type="checkbox"/> Military Science             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Criminal Justice              | <input type="checkbox"/> Mortuary Science             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Dental Health                 | <input type="checkbox"/> Theatre/Music/Dance          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Ecology/Environmental Studies | <input type="checkbox"/> Nursing                      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Economics                     | <input type="checkbox"/> Pharmacy                     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Education/Teaching            | <input type="checkbox"/> Physics                      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Electronics                   | <input type="checkbox"/> Political Science            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Engineering                   | <input type="checkbox"/> Pre-Law                      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> English                       | <input type="checkbox"/> Pre-Medicine                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Fashion/Merchandising         | <input type="checkbox"/> Psychology                   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Finance                       | <input type="checkbox"/> Public Relations/Advertising |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Foreign Studies               | <input type="checkbox"/> Religion/Bible               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> General Science               | <input type="checkbox"/> Renewable Energy             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Health Related Professions    | <input type="checkbox"/> Sociology/Social Science     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> History                       | <input type="checkbox"/> Travel/Tourism               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hotel/Restaurant Management   | <input type="checkbox"/> Veterinary Medicine          |
|  | <input type="checkbox"/> Other Major                  |

## APPENDIX D. HUMAN SUBJECTS APPROVAL

**IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY**  
OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Institutional Review Board  
Office for Responsible Research  
Vice President for Research  
1138 Pearson Hall  
Ames, Iowa 50011-2207  
515 294-4566  
FAX 515 294-4267

**DATE:** December 17, 2009

**TO:** Marge Welch  
2344 195th St.  
Afton, IA 50830

**CC:** Dr. Larry Ebbers  
N226 Lagomarcino

**FROM:** Office for Responsible Research

**TITLE:** **Measuring Current Phi Theta Kappa Cognitive and Affective Characteristics**

**IRB ID:** 09-573

**Submission Type:** New **Exemption Date:** 8 December 2009

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The project referenced above has undergone review by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) and has been declared exempt from the requirements of the human subject protections regulations as described in 45 CFR 46.101(b). The IRB determination of exemption means that:

- **You do not need to submit an application for annual continuing review.**
- **You must carry out the research as proposed in the IRB application**, including obtaining and documenting informed consent if you have stated in your application that you will do so or if required by the IRB.
- **Any modification of this research should be submitted to the IRB on a Continuing Review and/or Modification form, prior to making any changes**, to determine if the project still meets the federal criteria for exemption. If it is determined that exemption is no longer warranted, then an IRB proposal will need to be submitted and approved before proceeding with data collection.

Please be sure to **use only the approved study materials** in your research, including the **recruitment materials and informed consent documents that have the IRB approval stamp.**

Please note that you must submit all research involving human participants for review by the IRB. **Only the IRB may make the determination of exemption**, even if you conduct a study in the future that is exactly like this study.

**IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY**  
OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Institutional Review Board  
Office for Responsible Research  
Vice President for Research  
1138 Pearson Hall  
Ames, Iowa 50011-2207  
515 294-4566  
FAX 515 294-4267

**Date:** 4/13/2010

**To:** Marge Welch  
2344 195th St  
Afton, IA 50830

**CC:** Dr. Larry Ebbers  
N256 Lagomarcino Hall

**From:** Office for Responsible Research

**Title:** Measuring Current Phi Theta Kappa Cognitive and Affective Characteristics

**IRB Num:** 09-573

**Submission Type:** Modification **Exemption Date:** 4/12/2010

The project referenced above has undergone review by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) and has been declared exempt from the requirements of the human subject protections regulations as described in 45 CFR 46.101(b). The IRB determination of exemption means that:

- You do not need to submit an application for annual continuing review.
- You must carry out the research as proposed in the IRB application, including obtaining and documenting informed consent if you have stated in your application that you will do so or if required by the IRB.
- Any modification of this research should be submitted to the IRB on a Continuing Review and/or Modification form, prior to making any changes, to determine if the project still meets the federal criteria for exemption. If it is determined that exemption is no longer warranted, then an IRB proposal will need to be submitted and approved before proceeding with data collection.

Please be sure to use only the approved study materials in your research, including the recruitment materials and informed consent documents that have the IRB approval stamp.

Please note that you must submit all research involving human participants for review by the IRB. Only the IRB may make the determination of exemption, even if you conduct a study in the future that is exactly like this study.

**APPENDIX E. IOWA AND TEXAS COMMUNITY COLLEGES  
IN THE 2010 CCSSE COHORT**

The 2010 cohort was comprised of any community college or associate's degree granting institution who participated in the 2008, 2009, or 2010 survey. For a college that participated more than once in the three-year period, only the most current data was used.

Iowa community colleges listed as participating in least once within the three-year period include:

Clinton Community College  
Ellsworth Community College  
Iowa Central Community College  
Iowa Western Community College  
Kirkwood Community College  
Marshalltown Community College  
Mercy College of Health Sciences  
Muscatine Community College  
Northeast Iowa Community College  
North Iowa Area Community College  
Northwest Iowa Community College  
Scott Community College  
Southeastern Community College  
Western Iowa Tech Community College

Texas colleges listed as participating in least once within the three-year period include:

Alvin Community College  
Amarillo College  
Angelina College  
Austin Community College  
Blinn College  
Brazosport College  
Brookhaven College  
Clarendon College  
Coastal Bend College  
College of the Mainland  
Del Mar College  
El Centro College  
El Paso Community College  
Frank Phillips College  
Galveston College  
Grayson County College  
Houston Community College  
Howard College  
Kilgore College  
Lamar Institute of Technology



Lamar State College – Orange  
 Lone Star College – CyFair  
 Lone Star College – Kingwood  
 Lone Star College – Montgomery  
 Lone Star College – North Harris  
 Lone Star College – Tomball  
 McLennan Community College  
 Midland College  
 Mountain View College  
 North Central Texas College  
 North Lake College  
 Northeast Lakeview College  
 Northeast Texas Community College  
 Northwest Vista College  
 Odessa College  
 Palo Alto College  
 Panola College  
 Paris Junior College  
 Ranger College  
 Richland College  
 San Antonio College  
 San Jacinto College – Central Campus  
 San Jacinto College – North Campus  
 San Jacinto College – South Campus  
 South Texas College  
 Southwest Texas Junior College  
 St. Philip's College  
 Tarrant County College District  
 Temple College  
 Texas State Technical College Harlingen  
 Texas State Technical College Marshall  
 Texas State Technical College Waco  
 Texas State Technical College West Texas  
 Trinity Valley Community College  
 Tyler Junior College  
 Vernon College  
 Weatherford College  
 West Texas College  
 Wharton County Junior College

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