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## Sorority hosts event to boost literacy rates

By [Kallie Red-Horse](#) | Daily Lobo

Pi Beta Phi had members of the UNM community twisting their tongues to Dr. Seuss' rhymes Wednesday in an attempt to fight illiteracy in New Mexico.

Competitors in the sorority's second annual First Book Speed Read paid admission to read books aloud to children as quickly as possible at the Pi Phi house. The event drew support for First Book, an organization that provides books for children from low-income communities.

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Pi Beta Phi President Alex Roark said the issue of illiteracy in New Mexico is often forgotten.

"It's hard to market something like literacy and explain why it is important," she said. "There are other organizations that do great things for issues that are easily marketable because you see the direct cause and the things that come from that, both good and bad."

According to a study published by the New Mexico Coalition for Literacy in 2007, one in five New Mexican adults is illiterate.

Shauna Sulima, co-organizer of the event, said literacy has a direct impact on poverty levels in America.

"If you are not literate, you are going to have issues throughout your life, and it's a huge cause of poverty in our country," she said. "So, focusing on literacy is important because it is going to guarantee a good future for children and help prevent poverty."

The sorority chose to donate its proceeds to the First Book organization because it is an effective way to raise literacy rates, Sulima said. First Book gives students books periodically throughout their high school careers and motivates them to complete their high school educations, she said.

"The kids will have a book of their own and means of practicing reading, because the chances of a child going to a library on their own is very slim," she said. "First Book continues to give them books as they progress through their reading levels to improve their literacy and actually help them stay in school longer."

Sigma Chi participant Tim Mousseau said that he recognizes the importance of literacy in New Mexico.

"There are a lot of families here where Spanish is their first language," he said. "There are children having to deal with parents who only speak Spanish while also trying to learn English, and I feel like that can definitely add to the problem. I

think by getting the community involved, there is a lot that we can do.”

**Read NMCL’s annual literacy report at [www.NMCL.org](http://www.NMCL.org)**

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