Why Assessment? Considerations for the Campus-Based Fraternity/Sorority Professional
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As campus-based professionals, we serve as the on-campus advocates to the fraternity/sorority experience. Some of us found the field of student affairs due to the positive impact of our fraternal experience. We can identify the value of involvement, aid in the identity development of students, and promote student learning. Yet, our students and programs are often criticized for not supporting the academic mission of the University, and for participatory behaviors related to alcohol/drug abuse and hazing (Whipple & Sullivan, 1998). However, research also illustrates positive effects of membership. Some have found GPA, chapter involvement, and engagement to be linked in academic-related activities (Long, 2012). Others say members exhibit higher levels of social development and cognitive development (Pike, 2000). Further, increased levels of self-efficacy (Saville & Johnson, 2007; Wilder, D. H., Hoyt, A. E., Surbeck, B. S., Wilder, J. C., & Carney, P. I., 1986); and "highly engaged activities valuable to learning" (Bureau, Ryan, Ahren, Shoup, & Torres, 2011, p.13) have been linked to the fraternity/sorority experience. Such examples successfully articulate the importance of assessment in telling the story of our communities. As each of us begins to plan our programs and services for the academic year, our various assessments and opportunities for future data collection should drive our goals and objectives.

Schuh & Upcraft (2001) provided a model for assessing fraternity/sorority life programs, which can be utilized to develop your assessment plan:

1. Demographics: Seek various opportunities to gather demographic data which can paint a picture of your community. In addition, statistics such as GPA and retention/persistence rate will prove useful when preparing annual reports.

2. Needs: As our campus populations are continuously growing and changing, so too are the needs of our fraternity/sorority community. In addition, our chapters also have very diverse needs which should be met from risk management to leadership development training. As you plan your various services and programs for the academic year, a needs assessment will help you prioritize the needs that should be addressed within your fraternity/sorority community.

3. Satisfaction: Many times we benchmark our offices and programs against each other. However, it should be equally important to get the pulse of the students that we serve. By assessing satisfaction, we have the opportunity to gain feedback from our students on the various programs and services that we offer.

4. Culture: As stated in our examples previously, our fraternity/sorority students provide us an opportunity to examine behaviors, factors, and conditions of the quality (or lack thereof) that the experience offers, which help us assess the delivery of our programs and services.

5. Outcomes: The review of literature provides inconsistencies of outcomes related to the fraternity/sorority experience (Whipple & Sullivan, 1998; Martin, Hevel, Asel, & Pascarella, 2011). As campus-based professionals, we must continue to provide evidence to support the learning and development of our students.

These steps taken in context can assist the fraternity/sorority professional in developing a plan of action to assess the various components of a fraternity/sorority life program. Although, when developing such a plan, it is important to conceptualize how you plan to utilize the data. What is your purpose in assessing the program, service, or community? What are you seeking to understand? What changes would you like to address? These types of questions will help you analyze and interpret the data for implementation purposes at the conclusion of your assessment project. For example, during the spring 2013 semester, the Fraternity & Sorority Life Task Force at the University of Texas at Arlington sought to answer questions related to recruitment eligibility, chapter accreditation, and risk management policies/procedures. Throughout the semester, committee members consisting of students, faculty, staff, alumni, and headquarters staff collected and reviewed data from various sources including but not limited to GPA/retention data, satisfaction, needs, and demographic information. After thorough analysis, the committee presented recommendations to improve the fraternity/sorority life experience at UTA. This scenario illustrates the intent of using assessment to provide constructs to help guide the work of fraternity/sorority professionals. It is our responsibility as campus-based professional to utilize assessment methods and techniques to provide evidence of innovation and advocate the continued value of the fraternity and sorority experience.

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