

Hello from the Other Side: Advising Cross-Council

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As fraternity/sorority professionals, we interact with a diverse population of constituents and it is critical we are able to navigate these spaces while also fostering positive experiences for the students we serve. The Association of Fraternity/Sorority Advisors (AFA) recently released their Core Competency Manual (2018), where they identified 11 Foundational and Professional Skills which encompasses 48 total competencies fraternity/sorority professionals should possess to be effective in their roles.

Working across Differences is one of the driving competency areas identified in this manual. As a woman of color who belongs to a culturally-based fraternal organization (CBFO), advising predominately white women within the College Panhellenic Council (CPH) at a large, public institution in the south is not something that is naturally comfortable for me — albeit I love the women I am able to advise. I will note, for context, our office utilizes a shared advising model. While I serve as the primary advisor for CPH, I also work with individual chapters across other councils including the Interfraternity Council (IFC) and the National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC).

Working across differences is no small feat, but there are a few things I have learned as a CPH advisor that I believe can be applicable to the professionals of AFA. The three major takeaways I have learned in this experience are:

1. **Credibility is Key:** People need to be convinced you have the ability to perform your role — students, advisors, and alumnae are often your biggest critics. When I first began working with the CPH, I garnered many questions on my ability to perform my role simply because of my CBFO affiliation. After mentioning terms such as RFM or bid matching, the tone quickly changed. At the end of the day, people simply want to feel understood. Therefore, if you have a grasp on terminology, then your battle in gaining the trust of students, advisors, and alumnae is not nearly as arduous. Likewise, the same can be said if you are advising a CBFO as a member of an IFC or CPH organization. Try casually asking your students “who runs the yard” and witness how quickly you are able to garner credibility.
2. **Imposter Syndrome is Real:** What is imposter syndrome you might ask? Imposter syndrome is not a disease or abnormality. Pauline Rose Clance and Suzanne Immes (1978) describe it as the idea a person has only succeeded due to luck rather than their

own talents or qualifications. I constantly feel the pressure to outperform those around me because of the space I am navigating as a CBFO woman who advises CPH. For example, in a meeting with CPH advisors, I may know 99 percent of what is asked of me, but any small mistake within that one percent will make me question my own competence. According to Sakulku (2011), 70% of people experience imposter feelings at some point within their lifetime. In those moments where imposter syndrome creeps in, I combat it with candid conversations with supervisors, friends, and mentors. I start by acknowledging these thoughts exist — the key is to not let doubt control your actions. Additionally, I keep a running list of positive reminders of the daily milestones I have completed that validate the idea that the work I do is not a reflection of the thoughts I may have.

3. **You are a Change Agent:** In its simplest form, a change agent is a person who promotes and enables change to happen in a group or organization (Lunenburg, 2010). Serving in my CPH advisory role has allowed me to recognize the opportunity I can have as a bridge builder for our fraternal community. This has most clearly occurred in conversations with CPH women who are curious about my experience as a member of a CBFO. Candid conversations about my lived experiences have served as a catalyst in allowing the CPH women I advise to recognize the allies they can be for their often marginalized CBFO peers.

Today I want to challenge my fellow fraternity/sorority professionals to self-reflect on where you stand in your ability to engage across differences. I recognize competency levels will look different for everyone; however, we must strive to be a profession committed to having, at minimum, a basic understanding of all the fraternal organizations we serve. For new professionals and graduate assistants, I encourage you to advocate for opportunities to engage in spaces that will challenge your comfort level. I am appreciative of the professionals who mentored me early in my career on the importance of working across differences by providing me with tangible experiences to do so. For those who are proficient in this area, I challenge you to evaluate the way your role can be used to advocate for policy reform that promotes equity across all groups and organizations you serve.

The work we do is challenging, messy, beautiful, transformative, and a myriad of other words, but in order to be agents for change in this fraternal movement, we must all recognize the role we play in shifting the paradigm. We all are a small ripple in not only propelling this association further but ensuring the perpetuity of organizations we work so hard to protect.

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