

What if my chapter was virtual?

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Imagine an undergraduate student joining your organization who never stepped foot on a college campus. Think about the possibility of reaching the over 4 million students who engage in higher education through online or distance programs, but have minimal physical connection to their college environment. What would that look like for the fraternal movement?

Education is Changing

Online education has been providing the technology and the capacity to meet students' needs for decades. So why then, as an industry, do we seem so tied to the infrastructure provided by the "brick and mortar" style of traditional education when there are so many students who could benefit from the social connection provided by fraternity and sorority life in a virtual environment? As a campus-based professional, I believe in the benefits a campus experience can provide. However, I also recognize the benefits that could come from the development of a multi-level hybrid experience for members. I also recognize the inherent flaws of the campus-based model, and recognize as students gain affiliation at the undergraduate level they oftentimes grow more affinity to their campus chapter than to the inter/national organization as a whole. Local traditions develop, and over time the true "shared experience" of the larger membership is lost.

Developing a Lifelong Approach

A new inclusive experience would involve taking a page from our online education partners and reconstructing our member experience to encourage lifelong learning through the potential to earn badges or certificates for completion of varying trainings or experiences. By using a gamification model with points reward systems and level recognitions to pass from one certification to another, this approach helps members engage in what they are learning in a completely different way – and fosters more skilled members to give back through training opportunities beyond their local environment. Rather than simply providing new member programs, this model can be developed to include programs extending the entire range of membership and support efforts to keep members engaged throughout their lifetime in both personal development and civic engagement opportunities. Without the ties to a traditional college campus, cities and regions would have the opportunity to enhance engagement between all levels of membership, creating a true mentorship model many organizations aspire to but never fully attain.

Connect and Grow

As someone who has benefited from both online and face-to-face educational environments, I believe both forms of engagement can co-exist within our fraternal community. We can no longer ignore the millions of students who opt for an online education and the social connection our organizations can provide to these students in the various cities and towns in which they live. If we truly believe our organizations provide the best possible form of leadership and values based interaction a college student can participate in, we should find ways to engage more people in that opportunity. While there may be some challenges along the way, connecting online students to our community would be a large step in providing such an experience and growing our fraternal family.