

You Can AND SHOULD Make a Career in Fraternity/Sorority Advising

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Welcome aboard. As professionals, we come from a variety of places. For some, fraternity and sorority advising was your original career aspiration while others ended up here by chance. Our common theme is that you went to graduate school looking for a career in education where you could directly serve students and impact their development. Congratulations, you've found the best job in academia to do just that. You don't have to move up and become a Dean or a Vice President in order to impact students. In fact, it's just the opposite.

It is interesting to recall what was important to us almost 20 years ago when we started down our respective career paths. As young professionals, there was an excitement about truly understanding and embracing the "why" of the fraternal experience. We had embraced the concept of fraternal values and wanted to help others create an incredible experience. Our 22 year old selves were worried about the success of Greek Week competitions, recruitment meetings and leadership retreats. Fast forward to the present day and our current selves know that it is not in the program where vocation and calling are found. Instead, growth and student learning are fostered in the relationships formed and experiences created.

So for those who wonder about the value of making this a career, here are six things you can do if you decide stick around for more than just a few years:

Embrace the variety. Fraternity and sorority advising is unique from other roles in that you can touch just about every aspect of higher education in one job and work at levels other colleagues do not simply because that is what is required for us to do the job. We are organizational consultants, training and development consultants, development officers, legal experts, property managers, event planners, academic advisors, marketing and communication specialists and public speakers. When you stay in the field, particularly at one institution, for an extended period of time you get called upon to use these skills to work on projects outside your direct area of responsibility. This is when you truly move beyond being a fraternity/sorority advisor and focus on being an educator. You become a student affairs professional with primary expertise in fraternity and sorority life.

Build Bridges. One of the true benefits of staying at an institution for several years is the ability to leverage partnerships built over time with staff and faculty throughout the institution. The same is true of the friendships and partnerships with members of AFA. Everything we do is predicated upon relationships and some of the most productive relationships are built over years of collaboration. History together is a powerful tool as a professional. The ability to continually learn from others is both essential and rewarding.

Get a life. No seriously. We're not kidding. It can happen! Home is where you live and work, not just work. If you want to be happy and successful in this career you have to have a life away from campus that involves people and activities. By virtue of staying somewhere long enough, you get to develop relationships outside of work and connect with the community. We both volunteer in our communities, serving on the school board and coach youth soccer. This is as important as anything else you do at work. You will start to find that relationships that begin in one aspect of your work/home life can have amazing impacts on the other areas.



Find joy. Let's face it, our students do some ridiculous things. The majority of the time their choices are not a reflection of you or the manner in which you advise. Making a career out of fraternity and sorority advising guarantees that you will be a party trick at dinners for your friends not in higher education. It is not uncommon to hear, "OK, tell us the best story since we saw you last." Find joy in the chaos. Find energy in the reality that our work is never finished. Find security in the journey that we accompany these students on for their four (or more) years. The ability to care and be engaged has to be paired with the skill of perspective. Finding joy does not mean you love every part of your job every day. It's called work for a reason. Finding joy is about the ability to start again the next day without a sense of bitterness or resentment.

Focus on the learning. If you're going to stay in the field, you have to remember that it's not about you. It's about your students. You cannot measure your professional satisfaction against the success or failure of your students because if you do, you'll spend your brief career riding an emotional roller coaster that never stops. Find humor and excitement in teaching a new group of students the same lessons you taught to a different group of students last year. Third grade elementary school teachers don't get frustrated each September when they have to start teaching multiplication facts to their students. I've never heard a teacher say, "These kids! I just taught multiplication facts last year!" We teach, they learn – Every. Single. Year. The experiences you are providing make them better partners, sons/daughters, friends and parents. We are in the business of building up our students, which happens when they learn and grow.

Take the Long View. Perhaps the greatest benefit from building a long career in this field is the chance to envision change, implement that process, and see the transformation of a community. The reality is that creating and sustaining change in a fraternity/sorority community can take years to see substantial results and those who are engaged in one community for an extended period of time get to see the fruits of their hard work. More importantly, those communities have an advocate who is with them for the long haul.

Making a career of advising fraternity/sorority life allows for some of the greatest rewards. Committing to do something well creates a sense of meaningfulness in our work. And, maybe, just maybe some of those that you advise will follow your same career path. There is no greater sense of satisfaction than watching those that you have invested in and mentored as fraternity/sorority leaders pursue the same calling.