

## **Lessons from the January 2019 Convening of Senior Student Affairs Officers and Fraternity/Sorority Life Directors**

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One of the most evident takeaways from the January 2019 Convening of Senior Student Affairs Officers (SSAOs) and Fraternity and Sorority Life (FSL) Directors at Ohio State University was a need for fraternity/sorority professionals to reframe their role within the student affairs profession. For years, conversations happening at the convening have occurred in two different realms: one conversation happening with senior student affairs leadership and college or university presidents and the other happening with campus-based fraternity/sorority professionals and fraternity/sorority headquarters staff. These parallel conversations have prevented some challenges from being fully addressed, and this disconnect has led to stagnation in addressing challenges facing fraternities and sororities.

These conversations made it clear there is a lack of consistent communication and understanding between many SSAOs and campus-based FSL professionals. At one point during the meeting, SSAOs and campus-based FSL professionals were separated to have conversations around issues facing fraternities and sororities with the explanation there are FSL professionals who are uncomfortable with having conversations with SSAOs in the room. This is not a productive mind-set and will never allow for a productive conversation.

A senior level administrator in any functional area within student affairs is someone who needs to understand larger issues impacting the institution and how the area they oversee impacts those challenges. They need to be able to come to the table knowing they are the subject matter expert having done the research. Understanding their functional area's position and impact within the institution allows for more fruitful conversations with upper-level administrators. This also provides better abilities to advocate for the area's needs in better received ways that can bring change. This knowledge allows an FSL professional to be seen as the "go-to" professional who provides SSAOs a level of comfort when bringing FSL professionals to the table around solution finding.

Changing the mindset towards being a valued student affairs professional allows FSL professionals to see the value in other areas across campus and change those conversations. It alleviates the desire to be all things to all people, which was expressed by many of the FSL professionals at the convening. It also reframes what being a subject matter expert means.

Seeing each professional on campus as an expert in their area allows for a conversation around collaborative efforts to be framed in a positive and forward-thinking way.

How many FSL professionals have taken the time to truly reflect on knowing their subject matter expertise? What are they bringing to a conversation that other professionals need? FSL professionals must be the expert on how the organizations run, what to expect from (inter)national organizations, and how the relationships with alumni are impacting the member experience, to name a few areas. However, the ability to recognize a problematic issue within a fraternity/sorority community does not make a FSL professional the subject matter expert in that area.

FSL professionals know the population they work with has issues around drugs and alcohol. They may have some general knowledge around alcohol and other drugs research, but they are not the subject matter expert. There are individuals on campus whose sole focus is around alcohol and other drug issues. Those individuals have a depth of knowledge and continue to cultivate their understanding of the research and impact of these issues. What would it look like if more campuses were collaborating between these areas to tackle the challenges? A FSL professional could bring the knowledge of organizational function, and the alcohol and other drugs professional could bring the knowledge of best practices around drug and alcohol prevention and intervention. For all of the challenges facing fraternities and sororities, combining knowledge of professionals across the institution makes a much larger impact than any area working in a vacuum, and it alleviates some of the burnout expressed by many FSL professionals.

Overall, the convening was the beginning of a conversation around the challenges facing the world of fraternity and sorority. It was not a meeting that solved all, or really any, of the issues facing fraternity/sorority communities, but it started a much-needed conversation where SSAOs are seeing FSL professionals as professionals. Campus-based fraternity/sorority professionals should take the opportunity provided by the convening to engage in consistent dialogue and discussion with senior student affairs administrators. They need to capitalize on this opportunity to use their expertise and data to advocate for the needs of their students, both financially and programmatic. Lastly, FSL professionals must take the time to identify the experts across campus to collaborate with and help elevate the programming they are providing.

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