

## **Solving All the Fraternity and Sorority Life Problems in 8 Hours or Less: A Reflection on the Convening**

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In December, I received information from our Vice President of Student Affairs (VPSA) about the fraternity and sorority convening. I was excited, nervous, intrigued, and full of thoughts as I learned about this gathering. Attendees were asked to reflect on the following questions:

1. What needs to change (on my campus and nationally) in order for fraternities and sororities to fulfill their loftiest, values-driven missions? What can I do to advance these changes? How am I able to influence the ability of others to facilitate these changes?
2. If the complex fraternity and sorority system on my campus and nationally were operating optimally, what would that look like and what would the outcomes be?
3. Specifically related to cultural Greek letter organizations (CGLOs), what are the key outcomes we are aiming for with CLGOs and what are the strategies we can employ to get us closer to those outcomes?

Late January came, and the temperature plummeted as we were welcomed by a polar vortex and approximately 80 campus professionals (fraternity/sorority life staff and senior student affairs officers (SSAOs)) in Columbus, OH. We showed up in jeans, dress clothes, quarter zips, or whatever we were comfortable in. It was made clear the goal was to focus on what was really important, the conversations.

Here is a recap from the day with highlights or thoughts on each topic:

- Kevin Kruger, NASPA president, shared the campuses in the room represented a majority of undergraduate fraternity/sorority members. (An exact percentage was given that I don't remember or want to misquote.) That was powerful to me, not in a, "we are at the schools with the largest populations way," but these minds were coming together to think about the impact/influence that could be had on the communities we serve.
- We heard from campus leaders at high profile campuses.
  - Miami University's president shared there are three things at the core of values.
    - Living with purpose. Leading with service. Building community.
  - We were challenged to think about and challenge students to consider how the chapter values overlap with the university values and mission.
- We talked in-depth about the Association of Fraternity/Sorority Advisors (AFA) competencies inventory.

- Lynda Wiley, AFA executive director, shared how the data was being used and how the inventory could guide professional development.
  - It was also stated that this should be in the hands of every department chair/director for all master's in higher education or equivalent programs.
- We brainstormed what we needed to share with SSAOs.
  - I learned the communication between the staff in those positions that I enjoy, is not what enjoyed by everyone. This work needed to happen to ensure everyone was on the same page.
  - The learning curve for SSAOs who have not worked with or are not members of fraternities and sororities was also discussed, as well as how and when to educate up.
- We talked about NPHC, NAPA, NMGC, and NAFLO chapter's needs.
  - We were challenged to NAME THEM, not just refer to all non-IFC or Panhellenic chapters as "Culturally-Based Fraternal Organizations (CBFOs)."
  - We were challenged to consider how much time we spend with each council on campus and if our policies were inclusive of each council and organization.
- We discussed self-governance; what was working, the challenges, limitations, and benefits.
  - We tried to unpack why all student groups were not governed in the same way or how shared governance accountability model works for some campuses.
- Penn State shared information about the Timothy J. Piazza Center and the idea of a national scorecard.
  - Information was shared about dissolving the Center for the Study of the American College Fraternity at Indiana University and the shift of the information stored there to the Timothy J. Piazza Center.
  - We discussed inter/national scorecards – who was already doing them (i.e.: Penn State, University of Iowa) why and where to find more resources and information about this idea.
- We discussed the relationships with inter/national headquarters. Topics included: what was working well, what is the ideal future, what tools/systems are needed to get closer to that ideal? We also discussed the NIC Guidelines: what we liked, thought would be hard to implement, and what was missing.
  - The "us vs. them" mindset was brought up. While sometimes this is general and other times it is specific to a small number of groups or campuses, the reality is that in some cases there is a strain that exists between campuses and headquarters.

- The importance of data came up several times. For example, Indiana University shared their heat map tracking of individual and organizational conduct.
- The topic of why this convening included the roles that it did was addressed. To me it was simple. We have to be on the same page, know the same information, and be a team. But we also needed to gage what the consistent praises, needs, and concerns were before inviting others in.
- Finally, we talked about another convening and who needed to be present.
  - Campus conduct staff
  - I/HQ staff members
  - Umbrella group representatives

Prior to attending, I joked with some friends in the field that we were going to “solve the FSL problems in 8 hours or less” – knowing this wasn’t realistic. As this day approached, happened, and then became part of the past, I realized emotions ran high with this convening and jokes were no longer just that, but there was tension about who was or was not invited to “the table.”

When others found out I was there, I was asked “to keep them updated” or asked when “the one pager with all the solutions” would be available. I reflected a lot on this. I entered the day, not truly knowing the agenda, but wanting to learn, share what I knew, or share things we did that could be helpful. I hoped to come out with new ways of thinking and conversations that needed to continue between myself and the Dean of Students who attended with me. And that’s what I got from the day.

I posted the following on Facebook that evening. “My mind is still full from the NASPA/AFA/APLU Convening today. We had rich and thoughtful discussion, challenged each other, and I am challenging myself to continue this dialogue and reflection. I am and will be a better professional because of today, which is just the beginning.”

Whether you’re the most seasoned professional or a graduate student, campus based professional or a headquarters staff member, a VPSA or executive of an umbrella group, we all have things we can work on to make a greater positive impact on our day-to-day roles. That’s what day this was for me: an opportunity to reflect, learn, think about what the community I serve was doing well, and to think critically about where we were falling short.

Since January 31, 2019, I took the post convening survey, completed the AFA Institutional Survey, shared data with my colleagues in the Mid-American Conference (MAC) and others who reached out, started reviewing the score cards/community cards that were out there to determine what we might include with my staff, and created an online advisor

resource/training power point to share with our chapter advisors. Following through on the Convening was important to me.

I would challenge members of the association to spend time this summer thinking about what conversations you need to have with your SSAO, consider why have those not happened, and decide how do you help support the larger fraternity/sorority movement through sharing of programs, resources, or ideas. If you don't work on a campus, think about what SSAOs need to know from your perspective. Perhaps it's something about a chapter on the campus or help understanding the role of the headquarters staff, consultants, or chapter advisors. How can you spend the summer addressing some missed opportunities in your role? The idea of an online advisor resource/training module seems simple, but it filled a gap area for us by providing an opportunity for ongoing training or reminders for the advisors, as well as a one stop shop for documents, bylaws, recruitment rules, etc. So where do you need to start? I encourage everyone to analyze the data you have already. What's missing? What story does that data tell and how do you tell it? We all need to start somewhere. Where is that for you?

I don't believe this convening was ill-intended or meant to place blame. I think some of us, the professionals in AFA, made that assumption. I hope this article offered tangible examples, opportunities for benchmarking, and insight to what all we accomplished in those eight hours. At the end of the day, we are all fighting for and working toward the same goal, right? A safe and impactful fraternity/sorority experience for students who chose to/have the means to join. If that is the case, then I hope we can all, regardless of where we work, reflect on this and the other articles in this edition and move forward together, brainstorm, and share ideas with the NASPA and AFA leaders for the next convening and be true partners in this movement.

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