

Strengthening Relationships between Fraternal Headquarters and Campus Constituents

Dana Finley | Indiana University Bloomington | @danacfinley

As a campus-based professional advising 18 chapters at Indiana University Bloomington (IUB), I work each day with a variety of headquarters-based professionals with the goal of advancing fraternity/sorority life. Outside of my campus-based role, I serve in a regional volunteer role for the sorority of which I am a member, working with 12 universities across Michigan, Ohio, and Kentucky to build relationships with campus constituents. I also have previously worked for my national organization for two years as a leadership consultant. Each of these current and past experiences have allowed me to approach my work in building relationships between campus- and headquarters-based professionals in a unique and nuanced way.

Because of my experiences as a campus-based professional, headquarters-based professional, and national volunteer, I've seen a wide spectrum of successful and not-so successful partnerships. From these experiences, I've identified some key promising practices that I've seen work well to foster collaborative and fruitful relationships:

- **Communicating proactively:** On both sides of the table, nothing is worse than only hearing from a campus partner or a headquarters representative when something has gone wrong and spiraled into a larger issue. In my role at IUB, I make an effort to touch base with the headquarters of every chapter I advise at the end of each semester to recap the successes of the organization and to identify goals for next semester. Providing a touchpoint allows both sides to identify who they should be regularly reaching out to about chapter concerns and updates, and also allows time for proactive processing of where headquarters and sorority/fraternity life staff can be more impactful in their support.
- **Collaborating on sanctioning:** When a chapter is handed down a decision letter to complete educational sanctions as the result of an organizational conduct hearing, I think it's always helpful for the institution and the international/national organization to collaborate on learning outcomes. For example, if a chapter is sanctioned to complete a chapter-wide Alcohol Skills Training Program (ASTP) and their national organization already has a team of trained facilitators to provide ASTP, why not utilize their staff members to complete that program? Additionally, I've seen a lot of success when international/national organizations shape their sanctions to mirror or build upon sanctions that the institution's conduct panel has recommended for the chapter. This

strengthens the shared messaging between the institution and the headquarters and allows the chapter to complete their sanctions with (in my experience) less confusion.

- **Sharing high-level developments in the community:** We know the landscape of our fraternal communities' change rapidly. Much like my first point about communicating proactively, in my role as a regional volunteer, I always appreciate having big-picture initiatives and changes in a community in which we are a member group shared with our volunteer structure. Member organization agreements with the institution (similar to contracts), changes to recruitment structures and PNM requirements, and changes to expectations of chapter participation in required programming are all examples of items that are helpful to share early and solicit feedback. We know that big-picture changes like this can often require several layers of feedback and approval within organizational leadership in addition to affirmative votes in council structures. As a volunteer, I always love to be clued into those conversations early, so I can coach the chapter members on examining these expectations and how to advocate on behalf of their chapter.
- **Sharing high-level developments in the organization:** In the same spirit, it's crucial that organizations provide tools to their campus partners when large changes are being rolled out by the organization. I advise several chapters at IUB whose national organizations have rolled out significant changes to the structure of their new member process in the last year. These organizations did an excellent job sharing the high-level messaging via email about the updates to the program, and I felt equipped to discuss these changes with chapter leadership when I met with them one-on-one. Messaging like this also helps the chapter leadership understand the collaborative nature of the relationship between the institution and the national/international organization and makes them feel like we are invested in the success of their organization.
- **Share the wins!** This is true all the way around — as a volunteer, I love to hear about the successes happening within the chapters I support. As a campus-based professional, I love sharing those successes. When I was a headquarters-based staff member, there was nothing better than visiting a campus and hearing about a recent “win” the chapter accomplished — internally, in their council, or even within the larger community. No matter which side of the table you sit on in supporting fraternity/sorority life, our roles can be taxing. It's easy to get caught up in the risk incidents, the PR nightmares, and the disappointment that we sometimes feel when our students don't make the best decisions. That's why I wholeheartedly believe we have to continue to be intentional about sharing the good stuff too. I know some days it's what keeps me going.

Dana Finley is a M.S.Ed candidate in the Higher Education & Student Affairs program at Indiana University, where she works as a graduate sorority and fraternity advisor. Prior to arriving at IUB, Dana worked for two years as a leadership consultant for Sigma Kappa Sorority. Dana earned her Bachelors of Science in communication from Boston University. Dana is passionate about collegiate management and harm reduction and is interested in authentic conversations that can happen when these topics intersect. She serves as a national volunteer for Sigma Kappa Sorority and a facilitator for Kappa Kappa Gamma.