

Delivering on the Sales Pitch: Rethinking the Senior Transition

Rachel Westra, Pi Kappa Phi Fraternity | @RMWestra

Dylan McKenzie, Pi Kappa Phi Fraternity

It's the classic pitch to potential members and their families: "Join a fraternity/sorority, and you will have access to a network of alumni who will help you with your job search." "The skills you will gain from this experience will help you to be successful in your professional life when you graduate." "Membership is for a lifetime, not just for four years."

There is no doubt these are key selling points about the benefits of membership in fraternities and sororities, but are we really being intentional about providing resources and experiences to help seniors both graduate prepared for the workforce and continue to have a meaningful connection with their organization after graduation? We spend so much time and effort providing new members an experience that helps students transition into the organization, learn what it means to be a brother/sister, and engage productively in the campus community; but we are not spending even a fraction of that amount of time helping seniors understand how they can use the skills they developed in their future endeavors and what it means to be engaged alumni.

In 2012, a group of 13 men's fraternities partnered with Cygnus Applied Research, Inc. to conduct research and analysis into member engagement through a broad-based attitudinal survey of alumni and student members. After surveying 25,000 alumni and 5,000 students, Cygnus (2013) identified the following observations most relevant to the senior transition:

- (1) 80 percent of students identified developing leadership potential and networking opportunities as deciding factors in their membership;
- (2) the majority of students believe fraternity membership will positively influence their careers;
- (3) the majority of alumni members perceived little-to-no career benefit from their fraternity membership; and
- (4) over 85 percent of students agreed alumni have a responsibility to support their fraternity.

Based on these findings, it is critical as professionals we increase our intentionality when assisting seniors with their transition out of college and into the workforce and their life as engaged alumni.

In 2015, the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) developed a definition of career readiness and accompanying key competencies. According to NACE (2017), career readiness is the "attainment and demonstration of requisite competencies that broadly prepare

college graduates for a successful transition into the workplace” (para. 3). The key competencies they identified were:

- Critical Thinking/Problem Solving
- Oral/Written Communication
- Teamwork/Collaboration
- Digital Technology
- Leadership
- Professionalism/Work Ethic
- Career Management
- Global/Intercultural Fluency

As professionals, we can use the career readiness definition and competencies to be more intentional in helping students reflect on, and understand how, their leadership experiences helped them prepare for the world of work.

At Pi Kappa Phi, we utilize these competencies to intentionally develop programs and resources to help our student leaders reflect on their experiences, translate those experiences onto their resumes, and use them as relevant examples during job interviews. One example of how we utilize these competencies is by hosting a breakout session for students at our officer training to discuss how they can leverage their leadership experience in the job search. Another example is a newly created reflection resource for outgoing officers which outlines the NACE career readiness competencies and allows the students to identify specific experiences from their term in office that relate to each competency. Moving forward, these competencies will continue to drive a more holistic discussion about how the fraternity prepares all members for a successful transition into the workforce.

In addition to increasing students’ career readiness, a key component of an effective senior transition is preparing current students to become engaged citizens in their communities and remain lifelong members of their fraternities and sororities. Pi Kappa Phi, as well as a number of other inter/national organizations, is using a mix of both passive and active programming to support the senior transition. Three years ago, the team developed a monthly email series to provide both life skill and student member-to-alumnus transition resources for seniors. Using external content from sites like Monster.com, CNN Money, and Business Insider, this series provides resources on a range of topics including students’ digital footprints, student loan management, and strategies for successfully integrating into a new community. The fraternity also offers more active programming, like workshops facilitated by our traveling consultants, which provide seniors an opportunity to reflect on their Pi Kappa Phi experience and commit to both positive role modeling throughout their senior year, as well as productive engagement with the organization as young alumni.

Regardless of the strategy you choose, as professionals we all need to be more intentional in assisting seniors with their transition out of college and assessing the efficacy of our efforts. While there is certainly more to do in order to truly develop a holistic approach, we can all find small wins to begin delivering on the promises made to and by students as joined their fraternities and sororities.

References

Cygnus Applied Research, Inc. (2013). *Engagement research observations and recommendations: Themes, definitions, and recommendations from the engagement survey of alumni and collegiate fraternity members*. Unpublished report.

National Association of Colleges and Employers. (2017). *Career Readiness Defined*. Retrieved from: <http://www.naceweb.org/knowledge/career-readiness-competencies.aspx>