The Panhellenic recruitment process has been a stressful experience for many Potential New Members (PNMs). However, over the past year, campuses had to approach this experience from an entirely new angle. The use of digital communications and technology has been on the rise, but the explosion of the COVID-19 pandemic has forced many students into an online experience they never expected. With this intense push towards online learning and interacting, one platform has taken the spotlight as the main form of video conferencing many institutions are relying on: Zoom.

With the use, or as some may suggest overuse, of Zoom and other virtual platforms, a new phenomenon has emerged as well: Zoom fatigue. Zoom fatigue has had very real consequences for our students, as well as for our professional staff members.

According to Health.com, this phenomenon has occurred due to the way our brain processes information. Prior to COVID-19, when we were attending meetings in person, our brain focused on the presenter and their words, but it also picked up on social cues and the energy in the room. Now that we are confined to our virtual interactions, our brains are unable to locate those cues to process, so they are in overdrive trying to find any additional information. Additionally, we now have the added stress of watching ourselves on video, which can feel like we are “on stage” and cause us to feel like we “need to perform.” With the brain using extra energy for multiple hours during the day, this can lead to people feeling sluggish, exhausted, and drained. No wonder I’ve been taking naps on my lunch break!

Add this to the already stressful experience of Panhellenic recruitment, you can only imagine how our PNMs and chapter members are feeling. So, what can we do to support our students going through the process?

1. **Take Breaks.** During pre-COVID Panhellenic recruitments at the University of Memphis, we scheduled 10-15 minute breaks in between events. This provided just enough time for the chapter members and PNMs to take a water/bathroom break, jot down some notes, and prepare for the next round. This year, we scheduled 30-35 minute breaks in between the events. While this made the days longer, it allowed for our members and PNMs to walk away from the computer for a bit, multiple times during the day. They were able to stretch their legs and detox from the computer screen intermittently throughout the day.

2. **Stay Hydrated.** Increasing one’s water intake will help combat drowsiness. Someone’s initial reaction to drowsiness may be to drink something with caffeine in it, but caffeine actually adds to the dehydration, simply masking the issue. Instead of reaching for the coffee pot, grab some water. We encouraged our participants to make sure when they got ready to log on for each event, they had a glass of water handy to chase away any drowsiness that crept up.
3. **Get Comfortable.** To prepare for the long days of virtual recruitment, it was imperative for all participants — chapter members and PNMs — to be comfortable. We encouraged them to set up a quiet, comfortable space, including a comfortable chair/couch, proper lighting, and comfortable clothes. Additionally, many students invested in blue light glasses, to help protect their eyes from the increased amount of time spent staring at screens.

4. **Schedule Smaller Parties.** Scheduling smaller events allowed for chapter members and PNMs to take more breaks. Smaller rounds meant fewer PNMs per event, which meant the entire chapter didn’t need to be present for each round. This allowed chapter members the freedom to take a nap, eat some food, get some homework done, or simply get away from the virtual world.

5. **Offer Grace.** Remember we are all figuring this out together. Technology issues happen. Wi-Fi goes out. Pets jump on screen. Small children need assistance. Wrong videos get pulled up. These potential issues remind us we are all human, and they make the experience that much more genuine. Use these organic moments to break the ice, let down guards, and really get to know the PNMs for who they are.

As 2021 moves along, some campuses are looking at the possibility of having a second virtual Panhellenic recruitment experience. Many are discouraged by this outcome because they remember the exhaustion they felt during virtual primary recruitment. To say we have learned nothing from this experience, however, would be a total lie. This past recruitment season has shown many the importance of mental health and of taking care of our bodies. Virtual experiences can be just as exhausting, if not more, than in-person and our bodies are telling us that. Zoom fatigue is a real concern for many (students and professionals, alike) from an academic and student affairs perspective. It is important we acknowledge these challenges and work towards lightening our loads where possible.

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