Member Retention: Methods and Results (No April Foolin’! We’re Losing A Lot of People)
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Introduction
Our industry – on campuses and at headquarters – focuses a lot of time and effort on member recruitment and intake. But some fraternities are shifting their focus to look at retention of members through the entire undergraduate experience. In this session, four men’s fraternities will share how they track retention, their overall retention statistics, and insights gained from looking at those numbers.

Key points
• Inter/national organizations and campuses need effective data systems for tracking member retention from “bid day” (moment of joining) through “graduation” (when members become alumni in good standing).
• Past efforts primarily focused on retention during the new member period. However, recent research indicates that some organizations are losing a substantial number of members after initiation.
• Data collection efforts can be complicated by various member types and statuses and how those are applied locally. The ease or complexity of standards board processes can also affect member retention: Is it easy or hard for students to quit? Is it easy or hard for chapters to expel members?
• Looking at overall member retention can help campus professionals and headquarters staff identify “hot spots” – key times during the membership experience when many students leave.
• Retention analysis needs to happen at the campus-wide and inter/national level but also at the chapter level, with executive officers, volunteers and alumni engaged in the conversation.
• Interventions and efforts to improve retention need to be both programmatic (provided by campus or headquarters) and personal (through local relationships).

Partnerships/Collaborators
• Your data management department or staff members. Are you currently tracking retention? How accurate is your tracking method and data?
• Panhellenic and IFC officers. How can we partially shift the conversation away from recruitment and more toward retention of the members who have already said “yes”? 
• Local alumni. Many local volunteers (advisors and house corporations) can see year-over-year member attrition in a way that officers, who only serve for a year, can’t. They also understand the long-term impact, financial and otherwise, of member attrition over time.

• We would love to have more contributors to our analysis. Would you like to share your data with this team? If so, contact Anne Emmerth, chief operating officer, Beta Theta Pi Fraternity (anne.emmerth@beta.org; 901-569-0946).

Further resources
• What should our baseline for fraternity/sorority retention be? There are organizations, most of them associated with higher education accreditation, that track retention from first to second year, and then retention through graduation. Be careful! Many campuses measure persistence through graduation on a 6-year timeline, although some also report a 4-year graduation rate.
• Phi Delta Theta article about tactics for retention
• Research from the National Panhellenic Conference. “Gallup-Purdue Index: Fraternities and Sororities Understanding Life Outcomes"