

## **I'm a Headquarters Professional But...**

A. Jordan Fischette | Alpha Tau Omega National Fraternity | @jordanfischette

### **I couldn't do this without my on-campus partners.**

The fact of the matter is, there are certain things I can't do from a distance. I can't always look a student in the eye as they tell me a story. I can't always see the little victories they have so I can congratulate them along the way. I can't always walk them to the counseling center or give them a tour of campus. Heck, I can't even always give them a high five when they're proud of themselves! What I can always do is call my campus partners. From professionals in the fraternity & sorority office to the women's center, the recreation center and everywhere in between, I find success in my role and for my students by working *together*, and I couldn't do it any other way.

### **I refuse to pick a side.**

In an industry thriving in a world of inclusion, I constantly find myself in situations where I am expected to pick one side and exclude the other. Fraternity or sorority? Campus or headquarters? The list could go on. It's an oddity to me that behind closed doors the conversations are rampant, yet in the open they're regarded as a thing of the past. If I've learned nothing else it's choosing sides leads to stagnation and regression. When we choose a side to support, we end up spending more time tearing the other side down rather than creating an opportunity for both sides to improve. When we choose sides we divide a community that is already scrutinized. Coincidentally when we choose sides, we all lose *together*.

### **I don't have all of the answers.**

Often times, it seems as though someone hears I work for the national organization and they assume I have all of the answers. This happens with collegians and campus-based professionals alike. The best new member program? We have it! The greatest alumni ever? Ours certainly are! Unlimited money? We are a non-profit you know (okay, maybe this is the one time we are up front!). Competition internally and with other groups can sometimes get the best of us and cloud our judgement. As headquarters staff, it's important for us to stop trying to provide the perfect answers alone, and seek to find the right answers *together*. In my experience, our programming has become more effective when I've reached out to other headquarters staff to see what they're doing and brainstorm ways to innovate. As we've moved to strengthening partnerships with campus-based professionals, our members have become more engaged. When we let our ego take over we jump to the best sounding/quickest response, which usually leaves the best answer behind in the dust.

### **I do have a master's degree (and it's in something other than higher education!)**

When considering graduate school, as with most of my major life decisions, I focused on being intentional with the direction I took. In the end I decided a career in higher education was what I wanted, but a degree in it was not. I've always had more of a practitioner's mind than that of a researcher. I like to find connections between disparate phenomena in order to better understand, appreciate and disseminate an idea. My true passion lies with people. By focusing

on organizational behavior I learned how to combine the study of how people work in groups along with pieces of student development theory and the fraternal movement. When I work with my colleagues who studied higher education and student affairs, I love knowing we have different perspectives, but are achieving *together*. If they haven't studied higher education either (nor have a master's degree for that matter), I don't consider them uninformed. Rather, I get excited to see what they can share.

**I don't always feel valued.**

I saved the most vulnerable for last. As a headquarters professional, I often feel looked down upon in our profession because I haven't "earned my stripes." Apparently, many assume those stripes can only be earned on a campus. Sometimes it's a condescending look when I ask a question implying I should know the answer. Other times it's a patronizing comment like "oh honey, when you have a master's degree you'll understand" or "well I wouldn't expect you to understand that anyway." It's not always easy, but I work to surround myself with people who value me and my work. In turn, I do my best to show my appreciation towards others (see the first paragraph). I think when we all start behaving more like the values congruent people we present ourselves (and our members) to be, we can repair the burned bridges and more quickly advance the fraternal movement *together*.