

Does Local Mean Less?
Marketing the Local Chapter Experience
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“National Organization Membership Required.” In these four words, I saw my future as a fraternity/sorority professional seemingly slip through my fingers. After spending two years in graduate school, I couldn’t imagine my choice of sorority affiliation would disqualify me from a position in fraternity and sorority advising. But throughout my job search I realized being in a local sorority was not seen as an equivalent experience to my colleagues in national organizations.

During my search, it was suggested to me to affiliate with a national organization to be more “marketable.” I thought to myself how much easier it would be not having to justify my choice of affiliation or explain my undergraduate institution had both national and local organizations. But why did I feel the need to justify my choice in the profession that supposedly works to support all fraternal organizations? Was being in a local fraternal organization not enough to be “marketable” as a fraternity/sorority professional?

Luckily, I was also given advice on how to market my local experience and celebrate the unique perspective many professionals do not have. With that advice I was able to find an institution that viewed my local affiliation as a benefit in working with their community comprised of both national and local organizations.

Even though I have found an institution that values my experience, I have had to face other challenges in our field as a member of a local organization. I still encounter fellow colleagues who see a local affiliation as less than. I have been labeled as an “other,” and have even had no label at all on my conference nametags, leaving me feeling ostracized by an association I support. I have hoped students won’t see the comments I’ve seen on social media about the need for local organizations to “just go national already” or the call to remove local organizations from our campuses altogether.

Student members of local organizations face additional challenges when marketing their experience after college. We tout fraternal organizations lead to networking, but for local organizations that is not always the case. Local organizations are often not provided the resources for leadership and membership development that national organizations are given. Often the students I work with will not put their local fraternal experience on a resume due to the perceived challenge of explaining their experience, or more often, the lack of legitimacy that has been given to their experience.

How do we change these narratives? How do we help students proudly market their local experience?

First, we need to restore local organizations’ seat at the table. All national organizations began as a local organization whether it was 10 years or 150 years ago. Local organizations have

always been part of the fraternity and sorority community, and it is time they are included as part of the future. Our movement is charged with improving our campus communities, and both national and local fraternal organizations must work together to further our organizations for future generations. We need to use both experiences to serve as catalysts for change on campuses and change the larger fraternity and sorority narrative.

Second, we must support our local organizations and their members to improve their organizations along with our national organizations. Like national organizations, local fraternities and sororities have habits – students would call them traditions – which should be challenged in order for them to rise to meet the changing expectations for organizations. Local organizations need additional support to improve their organizations. As local organizations continue to make an impact in their communities, the narrative for their members will begin to shift.

Finally, we need to change how we, as professionals, support members choosing to enter student affairs and serve as fraternity and sorority advisors. We must work to make sure our association, our institutions, and one another, strive to discontinue practices that snub professionals who have made the lifelong commitment to a local fraternal organization. As a local professional, I will continue to represent the women of Pi Delta Chi, raise my voice for myself as a professional, and support the students who choose to join a local fraternal organizations, to make sure local never means less.