

Getting More Resources Doesn't Mean You'll Have Better Outcomes

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Having worked in higher education for 22 years (10 of those with fraternity/sorority life (FSL) directly), I can tell you the number one complaint across all aspects of this field is that we have insufficient resources to do the job. I have done FSL assessments/program reviews/strategic plans for 12 different campuses (mostly using the CAS Standards), and every single one of them told me they did not have the resources to meet their perceived needs of the fraternity/sorority community (FSC). Yet, when asked “what would you do differently” or “what would be better” or “how would this create change” very few had the ability to answer anything other than “just do more of the same.”

This is a real problem for higher education broadly and how it plays out in FSL might be our undoing. The purpose of this article is to explain the impact on FSL in a time when your department may not be high on the priority list for the minimal resources that have yet to be allocated.

In recent issues of the Association Update, the Minute with the Board articles by Justin Angotti and Anne Emmerth both address this issue to some extent. Justin recalled the 2011 article by Michael McRee called “The House is on Fire and You’re Mowing the Lawn” (a classic in AFA world that is completely timeless and relevant). Angotti arrives at the conclusion that seven years later, we are still not focusing on what really matters. He states, “Instead, we need to think differently about our work and what is truly important for student development, community safety, and institutional/organizational success.”

Emmerth’s sentiment is similar and goes on to express concern about building infrastructure to sustain long-term change. She advocates for the use of the core competencies (as does Angotti) to help frame our priorities for training and education about doing the hard work that comes in FSL. Emmerth states, “The work we do is meaningful, but not all of it needs to be hard.”

We make work in higher education so much harder than it has to be. Then, we cry we need more staff, more money, more materials to achieve what we believe (not necessarily able to prove) we need to achieve. I completely support the idea that more resources could be helpful, but I am completely convinced if we had them, we could potentially mismanage them in ways that would be a detriment to higher education and instill a weakening trust from our diverse publics. FSL cannot stand to have any more distrust associated with it within higher education circles and by our publics.

Still, you may insist you need MORE. Maybe you are right, but how more will come to you will depend on a few key practices that are grounded in the beliefs that you should be thinking creatively about how to glean those resources. Affirming the work you are doing should be the priority you make it out to be.

First, scan the higher education field, and you will see many areas that are truly under-resourced given the scope of their work and the changing nature of our campus demographics. Counseling services are at the top of the list. Multicultural affairs departments, adult, parent, transfer student services, and wellness staff are also areas I see insufficiently resourced that have a real impact on the campus community. The question to ask here is, “in comparison with those departments, what’s the real impact my FSC is having on this campus?” I love fraternity/sorority life as much as anybody, but at the end of the day, we continue to have problems of isolation from other students separate from the other problems we encounter (hazing, sexual assault, racism, prejudice, etc.). When you ask questions about real impact you can have for the campus, that elevates the discourse from how to have a better FSC.

Second, I mentioned a number of departments in the last paragraph. You should consider the extent to which relationships with these departments can help you achieve your goals rather than say you need more staff doing FSL work on a day to day basis. This is an all-too familiar scene: sitting talking to a student about their chapter and they open up to you about a real crisis they are experiencing. Our natural inclination is to counsel them through it and support them, but this is where a good partnership with your counseling center, case manager, or conduct officer could alleviate you from playing the role of counselor. (Which, when you do, also may border violations of laws and policies and open the institution up to increased liability.) Often when I do campus assessments, I suggest the number one thing that could change is how partnerships are sought out and managed by professionals doing FSC/FSL work — including engaging more with alumni and headquarters, as Emmerth explains in her Minute with the Board. This is a creative way to expand resources and engage more people in helping the FSC thrive. It is also a way to go back to my first point of demonstrating that the FSC impacts the campus and FSC students are ALL OF OUR students.

Third, looking at the Council for Advancement of Standards (CAS) for Fraternity/Sorority Advising Programs (FSAP), in the human resources section it states, “(FSAP) must be staffed adequately by individuals qualified to accomplish mission and goals,” and in the fiscal resources section they state, “(FSAP) must have funding to accomplish its mission and goals.” Do not read this as “we need more,” as much as you read it to say “how are our current resources allocated

toward our determined mission and goals.” Just as you would expand collaborations to increase human resources, consider how you can fund programs and services that matter and can be mapped back to your mission and goals through alternative sources. The key is to answer what matters and that requires you to look at data and conduct assessment. (Guess what my fourth suggestion is ...)

Fourth, take some time to reflect on what your mission and goals are and how well you are achieving them. Take some time to examine how every program or service you provide maps back to what you are trying to achieve. This is assessment, and it doesn’t have to be extensive and methodologically intricate as you collect information ALL THE TIME in your work through every conversation and interaction you have. Try to really examine what is no longer relevant (e.g., stop advising Greek Week) and figure out what you can cut to infuse programs and services that better meet the needs of the FSC and the campus community. If you had more people or money helping, how could you implement a major change initiative? Leaders in higher education are all about change initiatives, proving you would add value to the campus community through a major change initiative that may result in ending some other programs and services will be well received by decision makers.

Fifth, examine efficiencies and approaches. Both Angotti and Emmerth highlight the new [professional competencies](#). I am proud of AFA for this new version. I was part of the launch in 2004 of our professional competencies and it changed the discourse some, but ultimately I saw people coming up into FSL with some of the same mindsets and ideologies about how this work has to be done (hosting and sitting through long meetings for FSC activities was at the top of the list). Revisions of the professional competencies since the original launch in 2004 continued to declare the skills you should learn, but not necessarily how they played out in advising FSL or could be achieved at diverse levels. The competencies released in 2018 can transform your work. They can make you more focused and efficient and able to enact some of the skills you will need to impact the FSC and the larger campus community.

In closing, I understand the battle you have. I lived it for 10 years on the front lines and have stayed highly engaged for the last 12. I also see the struggle for MORE in other areas of higher education, and I would likely express the same sentiments to those areas as well. Consider how you can rethink work, including the use of precious human and fiscal resources, in order to truly help your FSC and campus community in a way that matters to student learning and development. If you still end up at the same place of needing more, then have the evidence to make the case to decision makers. Make sure you are able to explain how the limited “extra” resources a typical student life division has should be allocated to you over the other functions

on campus. You might be able to rethink things in a way that can give you some powerful new perspective.

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