

## **Inclusivity vs. Equity: Maximizing the Student Experience**

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As campus-based professionals, we should work to provide equitable services to each of the programs and councils we advise. We should assist our groups with an awareness of individual and community needs to serve equitably. We need to provide an individualized process and service that allows students to rise to a level that will maximize their experience in the fraternity and sorority community. In times of limited budgets, staff and resources; we unknowingly start straying away from equity and focus solely on ensuring inclusivity. We focus our limited time on ensuring that everyone has access to the same resources, to the point where we forget that the same resources may not be appropriate for each program and council. Taking into consideration the unique aspects of the organizations, we need to evaluate the council's policies, culture, community, and finances to best determine how to properly meet the needs of our students. When advising a group of students that consists of members from varying councils and chapters, we see a visible divide and conflicting interests when it comes to planning a community-wide event.

At the University of California, Berkeley (UC Berkeley), the Center for Student Leadership works diligently with student leaders from each of the four councils to plan an event at the start of the academic year. One of the largest social events during the week is the Greek Carnival, which was created as a late night, alcohol-free social option. As the years have progressed, each of the four councils has come to view the Greek Carnival in very different ways. For the Interfraternity and Panhellenic Councils, this event has enabled their member organizations to begin speaking with interested students and promoting the values of joining their organizations. This has become a valued event due to the interest in recruitment. On the opposite side of the spectrum, the National Pan-Hellenic Council perceives the Greek Carnival as a way to fulfill an attendance requirement set forth by the Greek Programming Board. In the middle of these two extremes, the Multi-Cultural Greek Council utilizes the event as a recruitment opportunity and fulfillment of the attendance requirement.

How each of the councils views and capitalizes on this event truly shows how uniquely each council operates. Having all the councils present at the event exhibits progress for the community, especially since historically, two of the four councils have lead the charge in how fraternities and sororities are represented on campus. Because of this culture, we saw the disengagement of some of our students as a result of a lack of representation in the planning process and event participation. This prompted the need to take a deeper look at the problems of the community and to address the issues of inequity. As their advisors we continue to strive for an equitable experience for our students so that they view this event as a reflection of their organization's values and seen as a valued member of the fraternity and sorority community. As advisors, we need to be introspective and view the situation from multiple perspectives. Through comprehensive inquiry regarding history and the current campus climate; a space should be created that allows for a balance of power regardless of the resources the councils are providing. We need to challenge preconceived ideas and advocate on behalf of all of our students.

Through personal experiences we have found the following to be helpful in advising a diverse group of students to move towards equity.



- **Be knowledgeable** – Attend trainings that help you professionally to learn about the “other” perspective. We encourage you to attend trainings such as a social justice institute offered by professional organizations or attend one of the educational sessions offered by the umbrella organizations at AFA’s annual meeting. It is a good practice to be proactive in learning the current state of affairs of each of the groups you advise to better anticipate the needs of your students.
- **Redefine** – Expand the definition on what it means to be an engaged member in the fraternity & sorority community. Levels of engagement should go beyond attending the event; they should be able to see the relevance of the services and value their engagement.
- **Raise the bar** – Advisors need to raise the bar for students to rise to a level that will maximize their experience. We should define excellence based on their current situation with their particular variables in mind. As advisors we see the big picture and their potential to excel. We should not limit them or raise the bar too high to the point that they do not see the relevancy.
- **Learn** – Have in depth conversation with the students; learn about their unique experience within their community that they are engaged in and serve. Get a better understanding of their needs and where they are coming from, beyond just their position. Take a genuine interest in their lives and successes – what their personal interests are and why they joined their organization.

Defining equity is easy but to translate into practice can be somewhat challenging if you are not prepared to address the issues with your students. Merely being inclusive is not the end result but a step to achieving equity. Inclusiveness is checking off the requirement list; equity is allowing our students to rise to a level that will maximize their experience in the fraternity and sorority community.