The Expedited Modernization of Our Support Systems
Todd Simmons | Phi Delta Theta Fraternity

Think back to early March of this year. If one would have asked any of us if we felt like our institutions or organizations were up-to-date and modern in our daily tasks, many of us would have said yes. We would have referenced the resources we offer online or the services we provide our students to digitize their operations. Little would we know, we were only seeing a snapshot of what we would be utilizing right now.

Whether it is the frequent drop-ins a student had for an on-campus staff member, or a typical phone call walking through a challenge with a chapter leader for an HQ member, our traditional support systems have come to a halt. The theories we have referenced and the, at times, archaic processes we had in place for student engagement have become somewhat obsolete. We are seeing that, now more than ever, we need to come together from each of our own perspectives to collaborate. This collaboration is key to repositioning ourselves to best serve our students and our communities.

We now find ourselves facing a myriad of challenges, yet one in particular seems to be woven into many of the others: how do we continue to support our students as we once were? There may not be a true answer to that, especially given the uniqueness of the situations for each of our students. What I do know is we must try and continue to persist for the students, for our organizations/institutions, and for ourselves.

One of the most astounding developments coming from our new need to modernize the support we are giving to students is the cross-collaboration that has exploded within the industry. The amount of Zoom meetings hosted and brainstorming documents created to generate ideas on how to continue to engage our members continues to multiply. It is through these mediums that, in my opinion, some of our new best practices will emerge.

Try to Virtualize It
Not everything can be recreated and digitized while still carrying the same impact. This being said, those same experiences we are trying to provide can be altered and adjusted to both provide engagement and to fill a relevant need.

For many groups/institutions, the idea of virtualizing an experience that was once in-person could be jarring. We need to remember, at times, we might be the only folks engaging in those programs who would remember that. We would be the only ones feeling the dismay that one of
our favorite traditions would be looking a bit different than it had in the past. It is time we put those feelings aside and truly show up for the students we serve and the experiences we are hoping to create for them. We have the opportunity now to reflect on what we truly want out of our events and see how those same lessons can be taught in a new way.

**Utilize Your Resources**

You may not be seeing it yet, but there could be resources you are missing when creating programs/initiatives for your students to utilize remotely. Whether it is an already-created facilitation guide you can use as the basis of your webinar, or some pre-packaged personality assessments you now have time to dive into with your chapter/council leaders, it might be out there.

Along with what you may have internally, there are an ever-populating amount of options becoming available. The industry partners that have been tirelessly working to generate content and to create new programming are doing so in hopes it is used. These are experiences we should be plugging our students into and providing for them in frequent touchpoints.

**Be Vulnerable**

We do not have all of the answers. We are not expected to have all of the answers. It is time for us to take those two statements and let ourselves feel them. For us to be vulnerable with one another, we must accept the need for it first. Once we do that, our industry could be unstoppable with the efforts toward supporting, engaging, and serving our students.

Being vulnerable with yourself is one thing, but we also must take the time to be intentionally vulnerable with our colleagues. Regardless of whether they work with you or not, the many members who make up our association all have the same student-centered goals in mind. This must serve as the grounds for us to further collaborate, from institution to headquarters to industry partner. Learning from and with one another will create the best product and experience for all students involved.

Many of the organizations we are so proud to be part of have all been born out of some type of adversity. This adversity drove our founders together, caused a spark of intellectuality, and catalyzed something that has withstood the test of time. It is now we think back to our roots and remember the willingness to change and challenge the process that has been in place for years.

If we choose to wait out this storm and not grow with the times, it could be detrimental to those who need us most. Now is the time we look ahead through a progressive lens and collectively
take the right steps forward. It is through this, and our belief in our organizations, that will continue to power our communities full speed ahead.

---

Todd Simmons serves as the chapter services coordinator for Phi Delta Theta’s General Headquarters. His role includes chapter/individual discipline, general chapter support, the chapter awards program, crisis management, and chapter/operational support. Additionally, he has recently led the Fraternity’s virtual new member education and engagement initiatives. Todd earned a Bachelor of Arts in business/organizational public relations from the University of Akron and a Master of Education from Ohio University.