

Theory to Practice: Participating in the Order of Omega Case Study Competition

Devin Hall, Iowa State University

Amne Harrington, University of Delaware

Student affairs practitioners must continually weigh decisions based on lived experiences and institutional policy. Case-study analyses provide a format for considering the implications surrounding decisions made by professionals on campus issues (Stage & Dannells, 2000). Participating in the Order of Omega Case Study Competition is a rewarding experience that will showcase your knowledge of fundamental skills necessary as entry-level fraternity/sorority professionals. As former participants, we feel strongly about the benefits one can gain from participating in the case study competition, and we want to offer some tips to help you take the most out of it—and maybe bring home that first place prize.

Benefits

One of the aspects we found most beneficial about the case study competition was the application of theory to practice. While our graduate assistantships provide us with fundamental experiences to complement our curriculum, we are not always challenged to approach the work we do with a theoretical foundation. The case study competition is a great opportunity to utilize the theoretical concepts from your courses and apply them to real life situations you may encounter as student affairs professionals. As you approach any case study related to higher education, it is important to remember that the growth and development of students is the central goal of college and universities, and student affairs professionals play an essential role in that achievement (Evans, et al, 2010).

A second benefit of participating in the case study competition is networking with professionals. Fraternity/sorority advising is a large field, but at the same time, it is small community of dedicated professionals. You will have mutual connections with the people in the competition, in addition to the judges reviewing the case study. The case study competition is a great way to build your professional network, both with fellow participants and judges. You may also encounter a presentation judge as you interview for professional jobs or at other conferences throughout the year. All in all, the case study can be a great tool for getting to know peers and professionals in the field who can be invaluable resources for you as you advance in your graduate and professional career.

The partner pairing setup is a great feature of the competition. Pairs are comprised of students with different graduate experiences, which allows for both individuals to bring their unique practical and educational perspectives to tackling the case study. You may end up paired with someone from a graduate program with a specific focus or specialization that your program does not cover, allowing you to briefly gain an understanding of those topics. Additionally, you may come from different affiliation and/or advising backgrounds, thus adding to the knowledge you can gain from one

another. The first year and second year pairing is an additionally unique aspect of the competition, and it is something we think truly makes the experience beneficial.

Lastly, the case study competition provides practical benefits of improving your public speaking skills and providing ideas to use in your professional future. Any and all public speaking opportunities should be taken advantage of—we as fraternity/sorority professionals are constantly called on to explain our activities and purposes to a variety of audiences. The case study competition is a chance to practice and develop those skills you want to improve. Plus, for those about to enter the job search, many institutions will ask you to put together a brief presentation on a topic or issue relevant to that community. You may find that the topic you present on for the case study is something relevant to your current campus or to a campus at which you apply for a job. The situation you solve in the case study is a real issue many campuses and professionals face, so all the work you put into crafting your solution can be applicable to real life situations.

Tips

First, pick the case study track with which you have the least experience. We know it is a competition, and believe us, we really wanted to win, but you should use this as a chance to challenge yourself and not pick the track with which you are most familiar. If there is a track that focuses on a topic you have not experienced or know you will not have the chance to experience, choose that track. Fraternity/sorority advising encompasses many skills and areas, so we have to be well-rounded to be successful. The case study competition is a wonderful way to add to your “toolkit” and may help you answer that curveball job interview question.

Second, recognize the value of collaboration. One of the factors that contributed to the success of our case study presentation was our ability to feed off each other’s energy. It is important that partners acknowledge each other’s role in the competition. It is also important to play off each other’s strengths. For example, in our presentation, Amne was really good at speaking to the programming and organizational functions while Devin was great at providing a theoretical foundation for our decision making process. You should communicate your strengths with your partner and find the best avenues to highlight your strengths during your presentation. You should also devote the same amount of speaking time to ensure your presentation is balanced between the two participants.

Finally, it is important to dedicate time to the success of your presentation. Set aside time in your days to come together and find the most beneficial and meaningful way to address the case study. This will allow you to expand both your content knowledge and presentation skills to gain invaluable experience from the case study. It is a win-win situation.

Hopefully, this article provided you some guidance as you think about participating in this year's case study competition. Best of luck!

At the time of the competition, Devin Hall was a first-year graduate student at Iowa State University, and Amne Harrington was a second-year graduate student at Bowling Green State University. Devin is now in his second year at ISU and still serves as the Collegiate Panhellenic Council Graduate Adviser. Amne is now a Program Coordinator for Fraternity and Sorority Life at the University of Delaware.

References

Evans, N. J., Forney, D. E., Guido, F. M., Patton, L. D., & Renn K. A. (2010). *Student development in college: Theory, research, and practice* (2nd ed.). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Stage, F. K., & Dannells, M. (2000). *Linking theory to practice: Case studies for working with college students* (2nd ed.). Philadelphia, PA: Taylor & Francis Group.