<p align="center">**The Tale of Two Ships**</p>
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The fraternity and sorority industry is one of diverse organizations, structures, philosophies on membership, and ways of developing chapters. In some cases, these differing viewpoints of one organization may conflict with those of another organization. One of the most significant issues facing our communities is invalidation. It is not uncommon for me to see chapters minimize other fraternities and sororities, deepening the divide between what we stand for and what we do. It is critical that we as fraternity and sorority advisors, headquarters staff, and volunteers change the conversation and begin to understand and support organizations through asking questions, gaining perspective, and correcting false narratives. We must model the way for our students so they can see that validation of their own organizations comes with respecting and understanding others.

I am a member of a local fraternity, and I am proud of my membership. However, to some, my membership is not considered valid. I remember going to my first AFA Annual Meeting and receiving my name badge upon arrival. It had my personal information on it, everything except my fraternity affiliation. I thought this instance was a fluke until the next year's conference in Boston, where the same issue happened again, and again at another conference I attended recently. Does my fraternity experience not matter because I am not in a national organization? Does that mean my fraternity experience is less insightful than someone who is affiliated with a national fraternity or sorority? The answer to these questions is "no," but that is not what is communicated to us both verbally and passively by many constituents.

I mention I am a member of a local organization to fraternity and sorority advisors, national volunteers, and undergraduate students, and I typically get the same response of resentment or a dismissive comment about how they are a poor representation of the fraternity and sorority community. Admittedly, my local fraternity experience was not always positive, but it taught me many of the same skills I would have learned as a member of a national fraternity or sorority. I learned a lot about self-reliance, problem solving, and how to build lifelong relationships through my fraternity experience. The knowledge and skills I learned as an undergraduate fraternity member still resonate with me today, personally and professionally. Members from national organizations are likely able to say this same thing, as the knowledge and skills you gain from the fraternal experience is not dependent on how large your chapter is but rather the passion within it.

My experience as a member of a local organization is one many students across the country share, but for some reason, that experience does not fit the mainstream. I am not the only one who has experienced invalidation with their membership, and I will not be the last. It goes back to how we as members of fraternities and sororities view one another, and how our biases or misconceptions about different organizations can, in some cases, cloud our judgment. We need to dedicate ourselves as volunteers and as professionals to learn about organizations that are

outside of our understanding. Reaching out to alumni and those who work closely with local organizations about the differences and similarities should be our first step in closing the understanding gap. We must begin to recognize those differences and advocate for those differences, rather than trying to draw comparisons to organizations or councils in which we are more familiar with.

Supporting all organizations and councils means this is an open and honest community. Breaking down the barriers separating the national fraternity from the local and understanding the reason why some fraternities and sororities recruit or function differently will allow us to serve our students more effectively. The more we choose to learn about and believe in one another to represent all of us, the better our communities will be. I have often heard the term "Greek Unity" and often find myself perplexed on how such a complicated issue can be boiled down to an over-simplified catchy term. Unity comes with respect, respect comes from knowledge, and knowledge comes from validation.

For some time now, there has been the belief that in order for students to join fraternities and sororities, those fraternities and sororities need to sell their stories. This is a fair point and it is critical that members understand why their organization is unique, however, they should be also advocating for the fraternal story noting the differences that make organizations special. It's okay to have differences and we should embrace them, but we also have things in common. Each organization has a specific set of beliefs and values, but most of the time, fraternities and sororities believe in and champion the same thing, stated differently. Organizations should be talking about how joining any fraternal organization could have a positive role in that individual's life. We should be working together to recruit people who are willing to be stakeholders and partners in our entire community, and there should be a belief that where one goes, we all go. We must begin to fight for one another, actively support one another, believe in one another's missions, and be prepared to represent the entire community in a positive manner. The idea about wearing your letters is not just about representing your chapter, it's about representing a community, a nation of affiliated members who (whether they like it or not) rely on one another. These may be high expectations for new members, but the shift in understanding and support of the entire fraternal experience by fraternity and sorority members must start early and occur often.

Ask me about my fraternity. I am confident we will share many things in common. I can tell you that I share the same experiences as you. We are not so different you and I, we are two ships passing in the night. We carry the same cargo, going to the same destination.