

La Familia: Thoughts on Latinx Interfraternalism

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It does not take long for research on Latinx fraternal organizations (LFOs) to reveal a level of commonality. Beyond a connection to ethnic identity, many LFOs were founded with the intent of creating unity amongst Latinx people. It's found in their names, visions, missions and purposes. The following examples, with rough translations, exhibit this concept. Lambda Theta Phi Latin Fraternity, Inc.'s motto is "En la **unión** está la fuerza" (In unity there is strength) while Lambda Sigma Upsilon Latino Fraternity, Inc.'s letters stand for "Latinos Siempre **Unidos**" (Latinos Always United). You find it in La Unidad Latina, Lambda Upsilon Lambda Fraternity, Inc.'s motto, "La **Unidad** Para Siempre" (Unity Forever) and several Latina sororities' names also espouse this value including Sigma Lambda Upsilon/Señoritas Latinas **Unidas** Sorority, Inc. (Latina Women United), Lambda Pi Upsilon Sorority, Latinas Poderosas **Unidas**, Inc. (Empowered Latinas United), and Latinas Promoviendo **Comunidad**/Lambda Pi Chi Sorority, Inc. (Latinas Promoting Community).

One of the oldest LFOs, Phi Iota Alpha Fraternity, Inc., was founded upon and continues to espouse the virtues of Pan-Americanism, the idea that countries in Latin America should be unified. The concept of unity is enshrined in the mission of the National Association of Latino Fraternal Organizations (NALFO) which states "NALFO exists to unite and empower its Latino organizations and their communities through advocacy, cultural awareness, and organizational development while fostering positive inter fraternal relationships and collaborating on issues of mutual interest."

While the concept of unity is ever present within the Latinx fraternal community, it has often been narrow in its application. Unity is something that is maintained within organizations but not always across them. Even within the broader Latinx fraternal landscape there are barriers between groups within and beyond NALFO. However, LFOs are powerfully positioned to evolve their concept of unity into one that fosters interfraternal relations and advances their shared causes of empowerment for marginalized communities within and beyond the realm of higher education.

Interfraternalism can be a powerful force for good within the broader fraternity and sorority community. While there are plenty of critiques of its application, the approach to collaborative recruitment by the National Panhellenic Conference (NPC) surely has merit and lends itself to considerable growth of chapters each year. Similarly, the commitment by the North-American Interfraternity Conference (NIC) to open expansion is an example of support for growth interfraternally. Common cause within the National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC) has helped to shape the fabric of our society with some of their most prominent members deeply committed to the cause of civil rights in our country. LFOs are in just as powerful a position and have made strides toward that end.

One of the barriers to interfraternalism is often the toxic competition occurring between LFOs. Indeed one of the primary reasons for NALFO's support for open expansion was the failure of LFOs to support one another's growth. As trivial as an open expansion policy may seem, it affords organizations the opportunity to grow and enhance their capacity to affect change on college campuses and the communities surrounding them. When discussing this topic with a former national leader for a Latinx fraternity, he shared "infighting trivializes why these orgs, our orgs, started in the first place." He went on to share his capacity as a national leader was often enhanced by relationships developed through NALFO. That increased capacity led to a stronger position for his fraternity, one in which infrastructure development supported the growth they experienced. He concluded his commentary by stating "the importance of our orgs connecting to help one another is...more vital than ever given our current political situation."

His commentary about "connecting" in "our current political situation" reminded me of a comment I made in *Perspectives* about how "I would love to see social action become the primary focus of FSL." I understand now that in order for social action to be effective within the Latinx fraternal community, it will take interfraternalism. The issues facing students who populate LFOs are best addressed utilizing the broad perspectives and vast resources that exist across these organizations. How might LFOs work to address the needs of undocumented students on the college campus? What are LFOs doing to provide support to the increasing number of Latinx students within higher education? Our work in our communities is amplified when we engage issues collectively.

There is a role for campus-based professionals in this work. We are often the gatekeepers to the vast support our institutions can provide. When it comes to our support for IFC or Panhellenic recruitment, it's all hands on deck. Are we showing our LFOs the same level of support? The issues that affect our IFC and Panhellenic communities are often discussed at the highest levels with students giving voice to their concerns and needs. Are Latinx students' issues and voices being elevated? It is crucial we view the work we do as advisors from a lens of equity and collaboration. We have plenty of opportunity as professionals to exhibit our commitment to and support for Latinx interfraternalism.

And while we all have a way to go, there are bright spots in this work. We see it in the partnerships between Lambda Theta Alpha Latin Sorority, Inc. and Lambda Theta Phi Latin Fraternity, Inc. to address sexual violence. I am encouraged by NALFO's Unity Endowment within the AFA Foundation and the council's commitment to enhancing the capacity of professionals to serve the members of LFOs. When those opportunities supported by the endowment arise, take advantage of them. I believe Omega Phi Beta Sorority, Inc.'s motto perfectly captures this concept "Servir y Educar A Través de Nuestra Diversidad" (Serve and Educate through our diversity). I firmly believe that when the Latinx fraternal community, La Familia, engages in this work together we are a force to be reckoned with. It is my hope we realize it sooner than later and our partners on campus join us in advancing our common cause.