I was the potential new member who memorized the recruitment booklet and committed the information to memory. Bid Day at the University of North Texas (UNT) included a candlelight ceremony where all the Panhellenic chapters came together in celebration of their new members, and the Panhellenic insignia was revealed. This ceremony drove home the point we were not just individual members of our organizations, but we were part of a greater whole. I took the message to heart. My involvement with Alpha Delta Pi at UNT launched me into the world of fraternity and sorority life beyond my singular chapter experience, and it connected me from the get-go to the wider council and community. This interest in the bigger picture spurred a role on the Panhellenic Council executive board, my career in fraternity/sorority advising, and my fascination with the fraternal experience and everything therein.

In the summer of 2006, I began a controversial hobby – collecting fraternity and sorority badges. It started with the purchase of a badge off eBay for $40. At the time, this was a lot of money for me, but when I received the badge in the mail, I was hooked. The University of North Texas didn’t have a chapter of this organization, and I had never seen a badge like this in person. With my love for Panhellenic I thought, “how cool it would be to collect all the Panhellenic badges and put them in the formation of the badge poster we’ve all come to know so well?”

Over the course of almost nine years, I completed my collection of all 26 Panhellenic member badges. My collection is now expanding to include the Panhellenic new member badges. At last count, I own 21 of 26 as well as the occasional men’s fraternity badge. Throughout my time collecting, I’ve learned about changes in badge style over time and the context in which those changes occurred. For example, Delta Phi Epsilon’s badge used to be similar to Sigma Kappa’s, but upon joining the National Panhellenic Conference in 1952, Delta Phi Epsilon added the scroll with their public motto “Esse Quam Videri” at the bottom in order to differentiate.
Along the way, the collection became about much more than just badges. I began to purchase other fraternity and sorority items, including pledge books, plaques, jewelry boxes, and organizational histories. I've gifted some things to one of the other six sorority women in my family, to friends in the field, or to former students after graduation. I consider myself an archaeologist of the fraternal world, unearthing forgotten members, saving badges from being sold as scrap metal, and cultivating a collection of knowledge as well as artifacts.

Beyond the collection, I’ve also made it a goal to visit fraternity and sorority headquarters. For the years when I have been selected to facilitate the Undergraduate Interfraternity Institute (UIFI), I have made it a point to travel by car to Bloomington, Indiana. By driving to Indiana and building in some vacation time, I am able to connect with colleagues and friends living in the area while making stops to tour different headquarters. It is fascinating to learn about the histories of other organizations and see how they choose to honor significant moments from their past. Lambda Chi Alpha’s new museum features an impressive collection of local fraternity badges from schools where those organizations affiliated with Lambda Chi Alpha (which I enjoyed thoroughly on my last visit).

In addition to connecting interfraternally, this hobby has allowed me to curate a collection of my own sorority’s badges I alternate wearing. My favorite is a badge once owned by Katherine Anderson of the Alpha Zeta chapter at Southern Methodist University (SMU) in 1957 during which time she served as Activities Chairman. Thanks to the Internet, I was able to determine Katherine was only at SMU for a couple of years, and then she vanished from the pages of The Rotunda, SMU’s yearbook.

I understand now my interest in other fraternal letter organizations is unusual for some people. My philosophy is similar to how I approach building relationships; it’s helpful to know someone’s origins and values in order to help inform your understanding and appreciation of who they are. As someone who believes we have much to learn from each other, learning can only occur when we
have partnered in the spirit of interfraternalism and an open mind. These badges represent the idea that we have much more in common than we often think and are a reminder that understanding our histories, and those of our fraternal brothers and sisters, are vital to our future successes.