

Interfraternalism from the Coalition of Collegiate Women's Leadership

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Interfraternalism. This is an interesting concept to consider from the perspective of an all-women's conference. If interfraternalism is loosely defined as the ability to work well with other fraternal organizations and foster support for all Greek organizations, a clear need for this exists. If we look a little deeper, true interfraternalism may exist to build a coalition amongst fraternal individuals and organizations. How we do this as women, and as a Coalition, is worth exploring. Due to our own professional and personal experiences, we choose to speak from roles we have experienced. This short piece will examine interfraternalism from both the student and campus advisor perspectives.

For the undergraduate students, and through the conference setting, it is essential to provide educational and programmatic options to build community with other women in Greek organizations. Conference attendees are able to meet other women of their same affiliations, as well as women from a variety of National Panhellenic Council (NPC), National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC), and culturally-based organizations. The conference setting allows for conversations about current issues and best practices in a peer-to-peer setting. This exposure allows students to see beyond their own chapter (and perhaps council) experiences. If we assume most undergraduate sorority members identify with the individual organization they join, they may have what might be termed a "chapter-centric" experience. This chapter-centric experience develops based on internal opportunities and experiences; often more leadership roles exist internally to a chapter than available on a council level. In order to catalyze interfraternalism, students must be challenged to see beyond their chapter and council experiences. Thus, creating intentional programming as a primary function of the interfraternal experience allows for students to understand the importance of building relationships both within and outside one's affiliation.

While the role of a fraternity/sorority advisor comes with unique priorities and challenges, the professional focus revolves around student development and organizational/institutional expectations. Blurred and possibly conflicting job responsibilities may exist ranging from advocate to investigator and mentor to administrator; this can be difficult to navigate. Within these capacities, supporting students through events, issues, and processes can be particularly difficult, especially if the advisor has not processed, managed, or even identified his/her own internal thoughts and perspectives. In this environment, it is easy to overlook the value of interfraternalism. Building coalitions involves maintaining professionalism and collegiality through disagreement, issues management, and partnerships. This reinforces the need for strong coalition building and collaboration efforts within the campus, community, inter/national organizations, and other key stakeholders.

As sorority women working in the field of higher education, we also seek to be interfraternal. In practical application, this promotes the benefits and potential of the fraternal experience in



good times and bad. It supports student development in the unique experience identified as an undergraduate membership in a sorority or fraternity. It is working collaboratively through the campus, the inter/national organization, and with students. Being interfraternal may also mean including alumni in this collaboration—and that may come with its own set of pros and cons. Promoting interfraternalism may require bringing as many stakeholders as possible to the table to find solutions, solve problems, and create opportunities for change. We must rely on the power of interfraternalism to strengthen all Greek organizations.

This leads to a variety of questions well worth exploring. As a professional, what is your definition of the fraternal movement? How does interfraternalism impact coalition building? How can we leverage interfraternalism to build coalitions to support the values Greek organizations were founded on?

After writing this article, we have more questions than answers. We know it can be difficult to advocate for Greek organizations in the face of tragedy. We also believe in the potential of the fraternity/sorority experience—and, this potential can only be enhanced by interfraternalism. We hope we have provided the opportunity for reflection and thoughtfulness. We are committed to exploring these questions with you as we continue to explore them ourselves. In a shameless plug, we would like to invite you to learn more about the Coalition for Collegiate Women's Leadership on our website at: <http://collegiatewomensleadership.org/> and to join us for the Coalition Annual Conference February 1-3, 2018 in Atlanta, GA!