

Define and Practice Interfraternalism

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The word *Interfraternalism* is neither defined in Webster's, Wikipedia, Google, or Safari. But in the vernacular of sorority and fraternity, "interfraternalism" has been coined with rich meaning and impact for those who embrace and live it daily. To provide a framework for this brief essay, who best to pose the question to, or for some the challenge of, defining "interfraternalism" than to individuals who serve fraternal communities as professionals, volunteers, staff, and leaders.

An abbreviated list of responses when asked to define *interfraternalism*...

- Promotion of sisterhood/brotherhood no matter the letters or the type of organization (cultural, social, academic)
- Inclusive, united, supportive, civic minded, giving, and evolving
- Mutual respect and understanding
- Working together with other fraternal organizations is mutually beneficial
- Building long term relationships with other fraternities and sororities is so much easier to cultivate than always seeking new partners
- Working supportively together towards mutually beneficial goals for the greater good of community and society
- Shared values and collaboration for the healthy and secure future for the fraternity and sorority experience
- Cooperation for the greater good/prioritizing what is good for all above ourselves
- Knowing the best that fraternity/sorority can be and striving to help others, regardless of their letters because our values and goals are so similar
- When sororities and fraternities work together toward the common good of making the members that join our organization better people than they were before
- Putting aside your "letters" of the common good of sisterhood and brotherhood

In the vast spectrum of definitions there are striking commonalities embedded in a word created to serve the fraternal community including: working together, mutual respect, shared values and goals, cooperation, collaboration, mutually beneficial, supportive, and for the greater good. Not surprising, but these same descriptor words are asked of students regularly as they seek best practices for serving the greater good of their own communities, the larger, broader community, and provide validation for the sorority and fraternity experience. Are the same descriptors reflective across the industry? With the best of intentions on the part of industry stakeholders unfortunately silos occur, outreach to others becomes limited by time restraints, sustainability, capacity, lack of knowledge, communication, or missed opportunities to collaborate simply happen. The industry is similar to watching ocean breakers...it ebbs and flows.

Is the practice of interfraternalism necessary? Some critics would say it is a divided and split industry. Confident industry leaders would resoundingly say “yes” – interfraternalism is necessary and vital for the continued existence of the experience. Respondents asked to define interfraternalism have clearly articulated the impact and power of interfraternal relationships. The complexity of putting practice and action to words becomes either the excuse or stumbling block. Fortunately, opportunities for collaboration and working together present themselves through initiatives, joint programming, summits, conferences of AFA, NASPA, NAPA, NALFO, NIC, NPC, NPHC, NMGC, and other associations who exist to support the industry.

Professional associations and umbrella organizations are called to action, just as we ask and expect the youngest members of our communities to practice interfraternalism as a cornerstone for success. Using the ocean metaphor, catch the wave...collaborate, cooperate, share, respect, support one another, benefit from relationships, celebrate shared values...define and practice *interfraternalism*.