

## **Governing Councils – Set Up For Success?**

JoAnn Arnholt, Rutgers University  
Kendall Niccum, Rutgers University  
Amy Vojta, Rutgers University

Working with a governing council can be one of the most challenging aspects of the campus-based fraternity/sorority advisor position. Mentoring student officers, educating member chapters on the policies of umbrella organizations, and providing programming complimentary to member chapter efforts are all key elements to a functioning governing council. But what if the governing council itself is not functioning in the best interest of the member chapters? As the landscape of the fraternity/sorority community continues to evolve, traditional models of an Interfraternity, Panhellenic and National Pan-Hellenic Councils (NPHC) have expanded to governing structures specific to campus composition encompassing everything from the formation of additional governing councils for member organizations belonging to the National Association of Latino Fraternal Organizations (NALFO) or to the National Asian-Pacific Islander American Panhellenic Association (NAPA) chapters to the merging of all member groups into one Inter-Greek Council (IGC).

Over the course of several generations of student leadership, the governing council model used by Rutgers University has changed. When current staff members arrived at Rutgers in 1995 the fraternity/sorority community was governed by an Interfraternity Council (IFC), a Panhellenic Council, and a Rutgers Pan-Hellenic Council (RPHC). The RPHC included members of NPHC as well as NALFO groups as students felt their experiences were more similar compared to the experience of their Panhellenic and Interfraternity Council counterparts. While member organizations in the RPHC did manage to execute one or two community-wide programs, for example a “Meet the Greeks” event, community buy in from the members was not evident. Community service, academic success, and basic leadership education programs were difficult to launch, challenging to fund, and were largely ignored by member chapters.

Ten years later, all of the Divine Nine organizations had chapters on campus and the undergraduate NPHC members expressed interest in leaving the RPHC to create a separate NPHC. After evaluating the potential for success (based on financial viability as well as the membership numbers in NPHC organizations that would be needed to support the leadership roles), staff members worked with representatives of the chapters to prepare governing documents, create officer position descriptions, and determine a budget. After its first year, the NPHC struggled. Several chapters were closed, membership counts dropped, programming efforts became largely ineffective, not enough students were academically eligible for officer participation, and student enthusiasm waned. At the same time, six Latino organizations opted to join the Panhellenic Council or IFC because they felt those entities provided a better fit for their needs. Meanwhile, our staff worked with the remaining Latino/Multicultural/Asian and South Asian fraternal organizations to rally around the creation of a new Multicultural Greek Council (MGC), but viability issues including not enough students, money, or interest, coupled with a lack of commitment among students led staff members to determine that the men would join IFC and the women would join the Panhellenic Council.

Since the addition of culturally-based chapters into the IFC and Panhellenic Council, both governing bodies have experienced various challenges and successes. Within both councils, organizations have developed relationships with other chapters with whom they were unfamiliar before being in the same council. These relationships have led to the creation of additional programming, collaborative initiatives, and educational opportunities. At another meeting, delegates engaged in activities to educate everyone about the differences and

similarities between recruitment and intake. The implementation of the larger governing bodies has allowed staff to provide education relevant to the entire membership, including hazing education, and officer transition. Additionally, campus partners that would like to share information with chapters now only need to speak at two meetings as opposed to four.

However, despite the inherent benefits of a combined council model, there are times when a combined council is challenging. As our fraternity/sorority community grows, the size of the councils themselves has made it difficult to accommodate the needs of every group. When developing council budgets, members express concerns about charging the same dues for all chapters considering the fact that some organizations participate in council programs while others will not. The timeline of council elections can also be challenging. Some chapters elect new officers in the fall and some in the spring which makes it difficult to position council elections to be attractive options for individual members seeking new leadership experiences. When marketing events, the Panhellenic Council must be cognizant of what logo they are using. Using the National Panhellenic Conference (NPC) logo on a flyer that promotes a recruitment event may be unwise if the event also includes culturally-based women's organizations in addition to NPC chapters.

As the spring semester begins and plans for our next election cycle get underway, our staff is once again evaluating our governance models. Our increasing interest in recruitment and intake, along with the gradual implementation of a minimum membership number has resulted in larger chapter sizes for all member organizations and signals that it may be time (once again) to revisit adding a third council.

A governing council can, and should, function in the best interests of the member chapters. Rather than defer to traditional models without question, campus-based professionals should carefully consider if the current model is best for the community. One should frequently evaluate governing council models, consider student input, clearly define performance outcomes and expectations about the composition of the fraternity/sorority community, and realistically evaluate the ability to meet those expectations successfully within the established framework.