

Time and Change Will Surely Show...

Kyle A. Pendleton, Zeta Tau Alpha Fraternity | @BuckeyeKap

Reflecting on my year in office as the Association of Fraternity/Sorority Advisors (AFA) President has been quite an enlightening experience. It is hard to believe it has been ten years since I took the oath in New Orleans to serve the Association. I have been asked several times over the past few months how I would sum up my term. I have found myself returning to the words I used in my final speech: "I see CHANGE everywhere." Where we are today as an association is vastly different from where we were then. But as I look back, I am still proud of that year and the groundwork it laid for the future evolution of AFA.

Let me now highlight some of these successes for you and as you will see, most are still areas continuing to evolve as we grow as a professional association.

Board Shift/Volunteer Management Work

A strategic initiative we carefully worked to execute was a move to more staff supported and/or supervised committees and workgroups. At our summer board meeting, we unanimously adopted our new organizational structure with the hope the expansion of the Central Office staff would allow for centralized project management and ultimately a greater return on volunteers' investments in the Association.

We worked with Karyn Sneath at each of our meetings that year and concentrated our efforts into being more than a functional, working board; we learned about being an exceptional thinking board. In order to do this, we shifted our focus to visioning and planning, thus allowing the staff and volunteers to have more ownership over their work. AFA has, without a doubt, the most dedicated, passionate, and hardworking volunteers of any association. With the Board's shift to big picture ideals and less micromanagement of projects, staff and volunteers felt empowered, trusted, and were able to achieve a higher level of success and satisfaction.

Central Office Staff Expansion

I was extremely lucky to have the opportunity to work with two Executive Directors. I began my term working with Sue Kraft Fussell, whose time in that role forever left an indelible mark on AFA and many professionals. We began a new era in May 2007 as Linda Wardhammar was hired to replace Sue and became only the third Executive Director in our Association's history. The staff grew with the addition of Karleen Dietrich, AFA's first Director of Programs. With the departure of Tracy Murray, who for three years served as Assistant Director of Membership, came the hiring of Jason Pierce, who began his role right before the Annual Meeting.

The Coalition

In the spring of 2007, after 18 months of meetings, working groups, and what amounts to collective bargaining, 11 campuses participated in the pilot semester of the Fraternity and Sorority Coalition Project. By the end of my term, eight more campuses were visited by an evaluation team. The Coalition truly was an ambitious project, and honestly, quite

unprecedented in its scope of collaboration and partnerships. This initiative was the first of its kind investment of all stakeholders – AFA, NIC, NPHC, NALFO, and NPC – collectively coming together for the future of our movement!

Strategic Plan

At the time, we were approaching the home stretch of the Association’s strategic initiatives. As a result, we shifted our focus to the “harder and more complex” remaining initiatives while beginning the preparations for a new plan. The outcome was to focus more on clarity of our purpose and the communication of that purpose to our members, continued utilization of volunteers and partners, and expanding our resources in order to better provide guidance and support to be inclusive of all our members. In fact, the final order of business we proposed, which was later approved by the membership, was to change the name from the Association of Fraternity Advisors to the Association of Fraternity & Sorority Advisors – a small, but quite impactful modification.

Renewed and Expanding Partnerships

AFA is not your typical higher education association. Our membership is comprised of individuals from varying backgrounds, umbrella organizations, campus demographics, and career fields. AFA’s commitment to being the “convener” of all individuals working or volunteering with fraternities and sororities is un-faltering. Through conversations and partnerships, NALFO, for the first time, held its annual business meeting in conjunction with the Annual Meeting in New Orleans. Additionally, over the course of my term, Sue Kraft Fussell and I had several calls and meetings with representatives from both NAPA and NMGCA offering AFA’s full support and resources as they began to see rapid growth and expansion.

In the closing of my speech, I said “...as a result of our work as an Association this past year, we, as members of the 2007 Executive Board, can say we are leaving with a true sense of satisfaction with our work.” Almost a decade later, a renewed sense of satisfaction is evident, but also an increased appreciation for where we are going.

Our challenges have always been in addressing the issues related to the collegiate experience. Alcohol, hazing, sexual assault, and inclusivity were, are, and always will be, our Achilles’ heel. When we have set aside our memberships and collectively worked together, we have been at our best. My fear is that as a profession, we are losing focus on the basic skills required to effectively advocate and advise fraternity and sorority members and be good professionals. For me, our association’s history has taught us we can regroup and we will be better!

And in case you were wondering about the title of my article...it comes from the final line of “Carmen Ohio,” and truly sums up my AFA involvement and commitment to the interfraternal experience:

“Time and change will surely show, how firm thy friendship...”