

Reflecting on Change

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“The more things change, the more they stay the same.” Alphonse Karr

Alcohol, hazing, housing, membership growth, and relationships were all at the center of the dialogue when the Association of Fraternity Advisors (AFA) was formed in 1976, and these remain at the center of our dialogue today. The Association was born out of a partnership between the North-American Interfraternity Conference (NIC) and the Fraternity Executive Association (FEA). It was determined there was a need for campus based fraternity advisors to gather, learn and network with one another, and the NIC and FEA provided the initial financial investment that allowed AFA to form. Over the last forty years, conversations about fraternities and sororities have evolved, however these foundational issues remain at the core of the work of campus based and headquarters based fraternity and sorority professionals.

I began volunteering with the Association in 1997, and then was elected to the Association Board in 2005. In the 2000’s, a primary focus for AFA was the development of strong working relationships with each of the umbrella fraternal organizations. The Association had produced a series of resources for campus based professionals on best practices when working with fraternities and sororities under each umbrella organization – NIC, NPC, NPHC, NALFO, NMGC, and NAPA. Through that process, we learned some of the umbrella organizations had not yet adopted a policy regarding hazing, or their policy was not publically available.

During my time as President in 2009, the Association Board felt it was imperative in order for AFA to maintain effective partnerships with the umbrella organizations, each would need to have a publically available policy regarding hazing. The proposal was debated on the floor of the 2009 Annual Meeting in Jacksonville, Florida and caused a high level of discourse related to the Association’s commitment to hazing prevention and our commitment to partnerships. Was it AFA’s place to tell other organizations what they needed to do? Or, was AFA trying to lead and ensure all partners were on the same page in our cooperative fight to end the plague of hazing within the fraternity and sorority experience? Ultimately, all of the umbrella groups did adopt a public policy regarding hazing, which has allowed all partners to move forward together in a cooperative manner.

Relationships have been at the heart of the Association and the profession of fraternity and sorority advising since the beginning. It is important for professionals to understand relationship management is an essential skill, and no community exists in a silo or works in isolation. This is also true for the Association. One of the most impactful accomplishments during 2009 was AFA was invited to join CHEMA – the Council of Higher Education Management Associations. CHEMA is made up of 44 professional associations all providing educational programming and development to men and women who work in various aspects of higher education. Membership in CHEMA allowed the AFA professional staff to connect and network with colleagues in NASPA, ACPA, ASCA, ACUI, NACA, and many more. These connections have

been vital to the establishment of resources the Association offers today, such as discounted ACPA membership, cooperative programming with ASCA, the Title IX conference, and many others.

By the end of the 2000's, the Association had established itself as both a partner in higher education as well as an interfraternal partner, and this remains at the core of our work today. Capitalizing on our position as both a higher education and interfraternal partner is essential. With the constant change in federal mandates, campus climate, student demographics, and financial viability, campus based and headquarters based professionals must partner to create best practices and resources for advising healthy and vibrant fraternity and sorority experiences. We cannot approach our work as independent contractors, but rather as a massive corporate network of men and women who are committed to excellence in learning and the development of collegiate members.

Fraternalities and sororities existed for 151 years before the formation of the Association of Fraternity/Sorority Advisors (Kappa Alpha Society, Union College, 1825). These organizations have withstood the test of time, and are woven into the fabric of many college and university campuses. Today, AFA professionals must support a collegiate experience that provides members the opportunity to be a part of a comprehensive learning laboratory – a collegiate experience where personal development and healthy group dynamics are at the center, and where an interconnected web of professionals and volunteers provides a framework for success.

As fraternity and sorority professionals, we are temporary stewards of this beautiful thing we call fraternity. Many men and women have come before us, and many will follow. So today, it is our responsibility to share what we have learned, engage in critical conversations, and provide a continued path forward for the experience. We must engage the very best minds in our work to find answers to current and future challenges. We are responsible to recruit and train those who will follow in our professional roles, and to role model for those who are entering the profession with a passion and desire to learn.

The Association and the profession are in the hands of today's AFA members. What have you done to better the profession and/or the Association recently, and what are your plans moving forward? Each one of us plays an important role and advancing fraternity and sorority, so join us in the exciting adventure ahead.