

## **Not Just a Stepping Stone**

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As a soon-to-be graduate of Bowling Green State University, I was trying to decide what I would do with my life post-college. I was encouraged to apply for a job with Alpha Sigma Phi Headquarters as a chapter leadership consultant for that would help me decide if student affairs was a career I wanted to pursue. I was not encouraged to apply for a job at the Headquarters because *that* could be a profession I could pursue.

When deciding to apply for a student affairs preparation graduate program, one of my mentors advised me to avoid assistantships in fraternity and sorority life. I was informed that working in fraternity and sorority life was a “stepping stone” position in student affairs and not a destination.

This is the same lens that many of our undergraduate members look through when viewing careers in our field. For many undergraduates, the only fraternity/sorority professionals they encounter are the traveling consultant or expansion coordinator, one or two years removed from their own undergraduate experience; the graduate assistant working in fraternity and sorority life; or the campus-based fraternity/sorority advisor, often one or two years removed from their graduate program. Through that lens, a self-fulfilling prophecy is often developed that working in fraternity and sorority life, either at a headquarters or on a campus, is a stepping-stone job for the younger professional versus a career. That lens is unfortunate and sells the work that we do short.

On many campuses, fraternity and sorority life is one of the major co-curricular activities, and its members go on to become some of the most involved and influential alumni volunteers and donors for their alma mater. As an undergraduate, fraternity and sorority members are often the leaders of other student organizations, from student government to the campus programming board to academic and interest-based organizations. Developing strong leaders and productive citizens within the fraternal community has both short-term and long-term implications and benefits for the host institution. And that is exactly what those who work in the field of fraternity and sorority life do – we help to develop leadership ability in our members and prepare our members to be productive and involved citizens.

The members that we mentor and challenge and support are often the alumni who remain involved with their alma mater after graduation through both time and treasure. I cannot remember the last time I visited a campus or talked with a staff member in the alumni office at a college or university and was told something other than a significant percentage of board members, volunteers, and major donors are members of a fraternity or sorority. The professionals in our field help to create an environment that motivates those members to remain involved and give back to their alma mater.

The members that attend our leadership programs or participate in our service immersion experiences are often the same individuals that give back and get involved in their local community. The seeds that we plant in 18-22 year-old students and water throughout their undergraduate experience help communities and non-profit organizations flourish later in life. Rarely have I attended a civic or community organization where there were not several board members or volunteers that are members of fraternities or sororities. We played a role in helping those members become community leaders and volunteers.

The work that we do matters – not just for the today but for the tomorrow. We are educators, coaches, and mentors, and just like any educator, coach, or mentor, our impact only increases with our length of service. Fraternity and sorority life can be the starting point for a career in student affairs, or a means to explore interest in the profession itself. Our profession can be a vehicle to help recent graduates give back to their organization or alma mater, or it can be a stepping stone to other opportunities. Our profession can also be a career. All are acceptable and none are wrong. We have a big tent of professionals that make up our field. Never underestimate or de-value the impact that we are making in the hearts and minds of the future leaders of our alma maters, our communities, and our country.