

## **Fraternity/Sorority Advisors: An Affiliated Perspective**

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In the world of fraternity and sorority advising, there was a misconception that the advisor must or should be affiliated with an organization. Being affiliated is not always the case, and, from my experience, it appears that unaffiliated advisors are becoming more common in the field. This article will tackle the issue of fraternity/sorority advisor affiliation from the perspective of an affiliated advisor.

Being an affiliated advisor has its advantages and challenges; all of which can be experienced in the same day. For the past three years, the fraternity and sorority life graduate assistant working alongside of me has been unaffiliated, which challenged me to think differently about how I operate as an advisor and how I think about “traditions” in our field. As I reflect on my advising experiences, I have come to realize how I often default to what are considered the norms in our profession, i.e. what I have learned from various other professional positions or even my own fraternity/sorority advisor. These are often not the things they taught in graduate school.

Being an affiliated advisor has its advantages. The students do not question me as much when I make recommendations or challenge their viewpoint. They know I have been in their shoes. There has never been a question in their minds that I am affiliated. This connection is usually considered the norm for fraternity/sorority advisors. The Panhellenic women know I have been through sorority recruitment, and I will not question why they are holding song practice during the summer months. The National Pan-Hellenic students know I will not question why their event is publicized as starting at 8:21 p.m. instead of 8:00 p.m. or 8:30 p.m. They all understand I “get” their experience. It is easy to be an affiliated advisor because I was able to learn a lot of what I do on a daily basis from experience. Graduate school may not have prepared me for the day-to-day tasks of being a fraternity and sorority advisor, but in many ways being an undergraduate sorority woman did.

In some ways it may have been easier for me to acquire a job in fraternity and sorority life because I lived the questions the hiring committee asked of me. The answers came naturally. During a job search, I did not question whether I could handle the position or not because I knew I had the required skills and background thanks to my graduate preparation and my undergraduate experience. It was easy to converse with students because I was familiar with their language.

On the other hand, being an affiliated advisor has its challenges. There are times I might give into their whims and traditions because I experienced the same. This is not to say I do not challenge their process, but I am more likely to understand the way they think. I typically think in terms of the process – how we have done things prior is important to me; tradition is important to me. I typically do not challenge the Panhellenic way of thinking as it is a philosophy that is near and dear to my heart. The Interfraternity and National Pan-Hellenic Councils see me differently because I am affiliated with a Panhellenic organization with which they have had their own experiences during their undergraduate terms. At times, they hold on to their judgments and viewpoints from situations occurring on campus and project those opinions onto me.

Another challenge comes in proving each day, with unaffiliated staff, faculty, or students, the reasons why we, as affiliated advisors, do what we do. It has made me reframe the ways I think about different concepts or traditions. It has helped me to better communicate what I do and how I explain what I do to different constituents. The time I have been challenged the most to think differently was when I hired my first unaffiliated graduate

student. Hiring an unaffiliated graduate student turned out to be an amazing experience; as I explained procedures and processes to her that have become habit to me, it was a reminder that I love what I do.

It can seem as though there is an unspoken myth to not consider hiring unaffiliated professionals in our fraternity/sorority world, with sometimes fraternity/sorority affiliation even being written into job descriptions. I encourage you, as professionals, to challenge this myth and hire as many unaffiliated staff members as you can. They have the potential to bring a new perspective to our world and challenge our norms. They will ask questions, which is a great thing! Give them equal consideration in the hiring process and find ways to ask how their non-affiliated status has provided them positive opportunities for growth.

Engage your students with faculty, staff, and community members who are not in fraternities or sororities. Students can become stuck in their affiliated bubble. We, as fraternity and sorority members, should not judge others for being initiated or not being initiated. We need unaffiliated individuals to be our allies, partners, and chapter advisors.

I would not change joining my chapter for the world; however, I do believe in surrounding myself with individuals who chose not to affiliate. Our Fraternity and Sorority Life program has consistently grown over the past few years, and I believe that is a tribute to our unaffiliated graduate assistants. Consequently, I believe our unaffiliated graduate students have appreciated the education they have gained outside of the classroom. I would not change for an instant my desire to work with unaffiliated staff members. It has been a powerful and an enriching experience not only for me but for the students as well.