An exciting aspect of being a graduate assistant working in sorority/fraternity life (SFL) is the exposure to something new. For me, this is perfectly encapsulated in the experiences I’ve had this spring working with our Panhellenic Council, particularly in their planning for fall primary recruitment. Many of us have likely been there before — describing our careers to non-affiliated individuals can be an exercise in futility, especially when explaining how the recruitment process works. COVID-19 has made planning recruitment an even more challenging endeavor, with the looming prospect of virtual and hybrid approaches seeming more and more likely as we learn more about the landscape that awaits us in the fall. All of this planning and conversation gives me pause to reflect on what I’ve learned so far. By no means do I consider myself an expert in recruitment, but I continue to find it interesting how little it has changed over the past several decades.

Rereading Kahlin McKeown’s piece from a 2014 edition of Essentials titled “Panhellenic Formal Recruitment: What if we are the problem?” has many striking points that still ring true six years later (McKeown, 2014). Throughout the history of our organizations, we have often been slow to change, if at all, and when we do change, considerable amounts of time and holding on to the past may hinder the progress we could otherwise make. What if we are still the problem? There is no doubt we have found ourselves in an extraordinary set of circumstances this year that is changing the landscape of our work as we once knew it.

However, I also think that we aren’t looking at this from both sides of the coin. What if this also presents us with an opportunity to take a step back and critically analyze our current recruitment practices? My hope is we take this valuable time that we are rarely ever afforded to think critically of our current practices, who they serve, who has established them, how they arrived at their current format, and ways they could be further improved.

Don’t get me wrong, I continue to be, and will always be amazed by the finely tuned machine that is Panhellenic primary recruitment, but that’s also part of the problem. I can’t help but think there’s a disconnect between presenting the process as values-based recruitment and going back and actually performing it as such. What is “values-based” to one campus may not be to others. Ritual is a beautiful aspect of any organization, but the way it is presented during recruitment often feels out of touch with the original message and intent of the founders, or an afterthought by the current members that are still processing how to live it out.

That is not to say progress hasn’t been made. A lot of campuses have made significant strides towards “de-frilling” recruitment, but this seems like an element of recruitment we have had a hard
time letting go of. Aspects of recruitment still perpetuate differences in social and cultural capital in Potential New Members (PNMs). For instance, many campuses do not require letters of recommendation and make them optional. The incongruence here is that they state it does not put you at a disadvantage heading into the initial rounds. If true, why are they an option? Is this a relic of our past that we can’t let go of? Originally, members were selected based on merit and reputation by the founders of the organizations — this progression stands out to me because it creates a deficit for many underrepresented students who would otherwise be exceptional SFL community members and forces them to navigate a new obstacle to a system that could have previously excluded them in other ways. Change is inevitable and can be highly beneficial to the future success of these women and organizations. A few final thoughts:

- **It seems like any “normal” we once knew is going to be, at least in part, left in the past.** The SFL experience might look very different in the coming years, and our best practices should change to reflect that.

- **PNMs coming in the fall and in future years have never done a Panhellenic primary recruitment — they don’t know what they’re missing or not experiencing.** Only current students do, due to the cyclical nature that is bringing in new members. This is an opportunity to break the cycle and create a new expectation and process in collaboration with our women. Many will be fine with using the current system, but others may be interested in creating a more equitable process.

- Some campuses have indicated they will be online in the fall, while others are trying to be on campus in some capacity. With social distancing, the common meeting space of the chapter house may be threatened. **If this is the case, what type of experience are our chapter members, advisors, and campus-based professionals promoting, and does traditional recruitment set this up for success?** It seems incongruent to me to continue to recruit the way we have in the past when it’s entirely possible that the operational and even social nature of organizations will be different post pandemic. Nonetheless, and whatever direction recruitment and operations go, there is no doubt that organizations will persist just as they have for over 200 years. This kind of opportunity to adapt and evolve is rare, and we should use it wisely.

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References