

Helping Students Highlight Their Fraternity/Sorority Experience in the Job Search

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As a fraternity/sorority professional, I believe it is part of my job to help undergraduate students learn how to market themselves as they prepare for the professional world. Through intentional interactions, we all have the opportunity to help students market their fraternity/sorority experiences in a positive light. Therefore, we need to support students by educating them on how best to talk about their fraternity/sorority experiences to potential. In this article, I will walk you through my process for preparing a student to highlight their fraternal experience on a resume.

First, it is important for students to understand some employers are familiar with fraternity and sorority life and others are not. Appealing to both constituencies when creating a resume is vital. For example, I recommend students begin referring to one another as members rather than brothers or sisters. The term members appeals to a broader audience and helps elevate the student to be seen through a more professional lens. Further, it surprises me how many students who are members of fraternities and sororities do not know their organization's official name! Make sure students note whether or not their organization is a sorority or a fraternity and is clear on whether or not the organization is international or national. Last, encourage students to reference their chapter using the school they attend rather than their chapter name on a resume. An example would be:

Alpha Phi International Fraternity, WPI, November 2011 – Present

Rather than the student indicating she is in the Iota Omicron Chapter, I recommend replacing it with school name. Also, because the member is a member for life, the end date should always be "present."

With those caveats out of the way, I like to focus on helping the student address how his/her accomplishments as a member of the fraternity/sorority relates to their desired career by taking the time to identify the field a student is interested in pursuing. Then, I have a conversation with him/her to help outline what s/he did. One strategy is to have the student take notes during your conversation as that can be a great beginning to finding ways to highlight their membership on a resume.

Have the student think about his/her role as a member like a job, with the emphasis being action or task oriented with a focus on what was accomplished.

Because you have now established what field the student is looking to enter – like finance, marketing, or event planning – you can have him/her be direct on their resume by creating a section that aligns with that field. For example, the student can create sections on his/her resume such as marketing experience, sales experience, or operations experience. As an advisor, you might need to help the student see the connection between this new section and his/her membership experience. If s/he is a vice president or director in an area related to the career s/he seeks, s/he can bring the leadership role into the newly created section. When introducing the experience, encourage the student to put the role first followed by the fraternity/sorority name, the school s/he attends, and the dates s/he held the role. An example is:

SALES EXPERIENCE

Vice President of Member Recruitment, Alpha Phi International Fraternity, WPI, Jan. 2011-Dec. 2011



S/he would then address the role just as one would address a job. Help the student be specific when referring to what s/he did, how s/he did it, how many people s/he managed, the budget s/he oversaw, the events s/he planned, and the outcomes that resulted. I always encourage men and women to answer the following questions when describing the leadership role:

- What did you do?
- How did you do it? Does that include the use of specialized software?
- Who did you work with? Did you supervise directors? A committee? Did you collaborate with other organizations?
- What were the results? What are some measurable outcomes including attendance numbers, percentage involvement, and amount of money budgeted?

The student should write in short statements when elaborating on the details of the position using the guiding questions. S/he should begin each phrase with a verb that clearly highlights his/her role. It is important not to draw attention to the organization's accomplishments or who s/he served; the emphasis should be on what the student did. S/he should not include pronouns or complete sentences on a resume. It should be clear and straightforward. An example of a description addressing the leadership role already mentioned above is:

Oversaw three directors and a committee of 20 women with the goal of attracting new members to the organization. Allocated budget of \$3,000 among operating costs, materials, four formal recruitment events, three informal events, and marketing materials. Delegated event planning while ensuring compliance with governing regulations and budgetary constraints. Recruited 36 new members and engaged membership of over 100 women in the process.

When the job function s/he is seeking does not clearly align with the fraternal leadership role then s/he could create a section on the resume called leadership experiences. In this section, s/he could include, and describe, the role, similar to the example above.

If fitting the resume to one page is an issue, s/he might need to shorten or remove the descriptions of the role. This does not mean s/he cannot be detailed in her accomplishments and skills gained in her cover letter or talk about it at an interview. However, the roles, projects, and jobs detailed on the student's resume should align with his/her career objective. If s/he has space after elaborating on the related experiences, have the student include his/her fraternity/sorority roles in a leadership experiences section.

If the student removes the descriptions, the order in the leadership experiences section, like all sections of the resume, is reverse chronological order. Always include months with dates because companies do not operate on seasons or by semester. Bold the role. An example could be:

Director of Chapter Facilities, Alpha Phi International Fraternity, WPI, Jan 2013-Present
Member, Habitat for Humanity, WPI, August 2012-Present
Senator, Student Government Association, WPI, August 2011-Present

If the student wants to only highlight membership in the organization, that is okay as well. Having one line on the resume with the fraternity/sorority and the dates highlights the length of the commitment, which is important to employers.

Ultimately it is up to him/her where to include the fraternity/sorority experience. Your role is to help the student think about how to highlight the experience. But, ultimately, encourage your students to include their fraternity/sorority experience on their resume. Being a member of fraternity/sorority is for more than four years; it is for a life time. The leadership skills gained, experiences managing other members, working within a budget, ensuring safety, and training new members on historical values are all relevant to the working world.