

## Moving Forward

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I can confidently say my fraternity/sorority leadership training experiences are in the forefront of my most valuable memories thus far in my college career. I attended the Undergraduate Interfraternity Institute (UIFI) the summer going into my sophomore year and attended the Association of Fraternal Leadership & Values Conference (AFLV) the following year. These experiences were beyond inspiring and enlightening for me. I left both opportunities feeling like I wanted to change the world and change the way people approach fraternity/sorority life.

UIFI and AFLV completely changed my outlook on what fraternity/sorority life means. I entered these experiences with a basic knowledge and respect for my ritual and what it meant to me, and I left with something sacred that would become my way of life. I left each experience wanting to be the change and the example for others to follow: to live my values to the extreme, to revolutionize sisterhood, and to see the fraternity/sorority experience for all that it has the potential to be. However, with all of this immediate excitement I felt, came the challenge of how to get my peers to buy into the same vision I had. The truth of the matter is, students are most likely going to be returning to groups of people who are not easily inspired or attentive to the ideas that they find so exciting and promising, and I was no exception.

My leadership opportunities occurred early in my sorority membership experience, which has both helped and hindered me. I did not have as many bad habits to break, and it helped me start my sorority experience off on the right foot. However, being “new” in my sorority experience, I did face scrutiny from my chapter. The semester after I attended UIFI, I sat down with the president of my chapter to have an honest conversation about what I learned and what could be improved in our chapter. During our conversation she was very receptive and open to suggestions, but when it came to action she decided to maintain the status quo rather than including the chapter in on my vision.

I was frustrated because I saw so much more for me, for my chapter, and for my community. It was then I realized that as much as you want to better yourself through this experience, and as much as you wish to have your members hold each other to higher standards, some people do not want that for themselves and you cannot make them change. As a result, I decided that if the executive members of my chapter did not want to put forth the effort needed for change, I would focus on the people who did.

I applied for the Panhellenic Executive Council that fall, and became the only sophomore on the council when I was slated as the Vice President of Inter-Greek Affairs. I was thrilled because one of this position’s main responsibilities was to facilitate a program called Future Greek Leaders (FGL). FGL is comprised of emerging leaders from the new member classes across councils and aimed to develop leadership skills, networking opportunities, and different experiences in order to best prepare the leaders for their future roles, whether that be in a council, chapter, or campus leadership position. As a member of FGL my freshman year, I saw that the program needed a lot of improvement. When I completed the program I left feeling no more informed than when I entered and it was completely disorganized; but I saw the potential for change in that program. I saw a group of new and eager leaders who were ready to jump into fraternity and sorority life headfirst and who would not look back. In my position, I was able to construct a full 12-week curriculum with lessons on creating community, enhancing personal growth, and strengthening our fraternal values. Along with my council counterparts, we were able to educate 40 emerging leaders on our campus, all thanks to the ideas and skills that I learned from UIFI and AFLV.

For me, the key to keeping my momentum from UIFI and AFLV was first recognizing the impact that those experiences had on me. I saw myself changing and I began holding myself to the highest standard because that is what I promised to do as a member of my organization. The next key was recognizing the impact these experiences could have for others. I was very grateful to have received the opportunity to attend UIFI and AFLV and I wished that every member could attend these institutes, but since that is not realistic, I made it my goal to bring back as much as I could to my community. I did not want to come back and continue my membership pre-leadership opportunity; I recognized that I was chosen to attend so that I could be held responsible for making a difference on campus. My third and final key to maintaining momentum is remaining optimistic and realistic, which comes down to recognizing that you cannot change everything or everyone, but that you can make a difference that will inspire others to join your efforts. Finding a group of people who are influential and who want to learn is crucial.

One of my favorite quotes that I heard at UIFI was by Marianne Williamson, and it has stuck with me to this day: “As we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give others permission to do the same.” I would like to think that by sticking to what I believe in and being the person who lives their values has impacted others. I have been lucky enough to see the fruits of my labor, and see others become excited about their leadership opportunities and to me that is success. As leaders, we are a sum of our experiences, our successes, our failed attempts, our moments of pride, and moments of despair. It takes one person to create a domino effect and inspire others to be the change, and by dedicating yourself to being that first domino, you are creating a legacy that lives up to the leadership training experiences that you have been fortunate enough to attend.