

Helping Students Maximize their Leadership Training Experiences

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The intended outcome of most summer educational programs is for students to be able to analyze and evaluate their values, leadership skills, and attitudes and beliefs as they relate to their fraternity/sorority experience. For this level of learning to occur, we believe it is important that a continuation of the conversation take place at the local level. As students return to campus from summer educational experiences like presidents' academies, leadership schools, and conventions, there is an opportunity for fraternity/sorority advisors to connect with them to further the learning that took place. Inter/national organizations design summer leadership and convention experiences to ultimately affect change within our chapters, but we know that our chapters exist within the larger fraternity/sorority community on their campuses. Recognizing these intended outcomes, we have compiled a set of recommendations to help students maximize leadership training experiences after returning to their campuses in the fall.

First, it is important to recognize how a student's educational experience fits into affecting change within the local community. Is the experience they had more effective on the chapter level solely, or would it lend itself to a larger community conversation as well? Once you recognize how the particular program might be applied best, you can begin to design conversations with students to support their continual learning. For example, a student returning from convention programming may have had an experience that is more focused towards refining operations in their respective chapter while a student who has attended a more general leadership development experience may wish to apply that to the larger fraternity/sorority community. Understanding the difference between these two experiences can prevent stretching curriculum further than it was designed to, leading to disappointing results.

Second, utilize these experiences as the start for coalitions. As you review the variety of programs the members of your community attended, and recognize the various points of impact, think about how you can bring students together who had similar experiences. Engaging multiple perspectives in conversation may allow students to make further meaning of their summer experiences and provide them with allies as they develop thoughts and plans for making change within their chapters and community. By talking about what was learned with people who share a deeper understanding of the campus environment, students can identify how to apply the national perspective to the campus level. It would be beneficial for your students to utilize national staff who can provide additional materials and help connect curriculum with campus experiences. Reach out to inter/national headquarters staff for these additional materials! If materials have already been shared with you, what additional information is necessary for you to understand the desired outcomes of the national experience and continue those conversations with students on your campus?

Given what you know about your community and the chapters within it, it is helpful to think about what obstacles or resistance students might face. We have all seen this happen before and some of us have experienced it ourselves. For example, a student returning from a summer leadership development experience who is not currently serving in a formal officer role may struggle with how to have conversations with their chapter members about what they learned. How does that student need to think about framing those conversations differently? How can you build that student's confidence so they can have better conversations? Or in another scenario, a student leader may return from an experience and realize how much potential for change is being overlooked by their community. How do these students need to share their experience to build allies for change within their chapter and/or campus

environment? Thinking about this part of the change process before having conversations with students will allow more focused coaching during meetings where students identify these obstacles for themselves and their potential solutions. Think about how you can coach students through identifying and overcoming those challenges quickly so that their excitement and energy is maintained and validated. Building students up to overcome the identified obstacles helps strengthen their capacity to continue the educational experience through conversations and change strategies.

How and where students are engaged after a summer learning experience can make a big difference in results. Summer learning experiences are designed differently from a typical student/professional one-on-one meeting in that they include open learning environments, small group conversation, large group learning, brainstorming and open space dialogue. By conducting meetings over meals or through small, informal get-togethers, students are placed in an environment that promotes creative thinking and extends the creative learning space they engaged in during the summer. It is important, however, to choose an environment that is also constructive to the conversation and keeps them focused on learning. Overall, this change in meeting space shares with students that you are there to invest in them and help them to facilitate change at the local level.

Finally, it is also important to identify ways that the student can translate their summer learning into future experiences on campus, in their chapters or even for their inter/national organization. You can help identify ways students can implement the changes or ideas they have generated through their attendance at summer programming. We suggest having conversations with students to determine how they can best influence the change they want to see and providing assistance in executing their desired plans for change. Students may choose the next steps of running for a leadership position they feel they can affect change through, and others may go on to apply for staff opportunities with their organization. If your office allows, you may have the ability to create an internship opportunity for them to further execute their plan. Ultimately, in order to maximize the student learning experience from summer programming we must design intentional conversations that keep the momentum and assist in identifying avenues to use that momentum to develop further student learning.