What's the value in CORE?: Using Assessment to Drive Fraternity Programming

Chris Pockette │ Lambda Chi Alpha Fraternity
Nathan Schultz │Lambda Chi Alpha Fraternity

Lambda Chi Alpha has always prided itself on using its Chapter Operating Standards to assess the performance of its chapters and colonies. However, the Chapter Operating Standards are just that: standards assessing the operational components of a chapter. What about the attitude, culture, and overall experience of the chapter? Could a strong operational chapter lack the ability to present a true Lambda Chi Alpha experience on a college campus?

What is the CORE Program?

To respond to this need of assessment for chapter culture and experience, Lambda Chi Alpha created the CORE (Chapter/Colony Operations Reflection and Elevation) Program. The program serves as an opportunity for chapters and members to reflect on their previous year experience through a self-created report. There are no repercussions to CORE performance. Rather, it is meant to serve as a reflection tool helping chapters elevate their overall performance. The program focuses on eight operational areas: administration and management, growth and retention, member development, leadership advancement, community engagement, academic excellence, external support, and harm reduction.

The CORE Report is the mechanism chapters use to provide their reflections on the previous year's performance. The report is broken down by section for each of the eight operational areas listed above. Each chapter is expected to submit a CORE Report by April 15 of each year. Following the April 15 submissions, CORE Reports are assessed and graded using an internal rubric to discover a chapter's overall performance. The results of the assessment are shared with each chapter to highlight the strengths while presenting areas of improvement for the upcoming year.

Opportunities for Lambda Chi Alpha through CORE

Although CORE may seem like another assessment tool, it has expanded beyond traditional assessment to provide additional opportunities for Lambda Chi Alpha members, chapters, alumni, campus partners, and the general fraternity.

First, we have seen many benefits for our undergraduate members and chapters. Members of the chapter are expected to reflect on their current experience and distinguish what makes their experience in line with Lambda Chi Alpha values and principles. The questions in the CORE Report do not simply ask if a chapter has completed programs or activities; rather, the questions ask why activities were conducted, how the activities were executed, and lessons learned from the activities and programs. Additionally, Lambda Chi Alpha has integrated its awards and recognition

process into the CORE Program. Chapter-wide awards are assigned based on overall and section-specific CORE Report performance, allowing all chapters the opportunity to be recognized for their work.

Second, we have seen opportunities to further our relationships with alumni and campus partners through the CORE Program. Following the April 15 submission deadline, alumni and campus partners are engaged to assist with CORE Report assessment and grading. Those alumni and campus partners who assist with grading are able to look deeper into Lambda Chi Alpha operations and provide essential feedback to chapters and members. This is a win-win: chapters receive feedback from other stakeholders besides Lambda Chi Alpha staff while alumni and campus partners gain a stronger understanding of the operations of the fraternity.

Third, the CORE Program has provided opportunities for our international headquarters to further enhance the resources and support provided to chapters. We are continuing to integrate CORE into all aspects of the general fraternity's operations. For example, we have provided programming at our summer Stead Leadership Seminar conference based around the eight operational areas of CORE, with each chapter being assigned to the two lowest performing areas based on the previous year CORE Report. Also, we are implementing CORE-focused visits from our staff that target specific CORE operational areas to personalize our visitation model to each chapter's needs. Previously, each chapter received the same style of visit each and every term.

Future Opportunities for Further Development with CORE
With the CORE Program still being relatively new, we have many opportunities for future growth. By collecting plans, templates, and ideas from our 190+ chapters, we have the ability to take this information to create a large pool of resources for our chapters to use. This could make sharing resources more streamlined and allow for our international headquarters to create specific programming tracks at our annual conferences based on chapter needs. We will also be able to see trends among our chapters that allow us to focus on key areas that we, as the general fraternity, need to better educate our chapters on such as recruitment, harm reduction, alumni engagement, etc.

By having multiple years of data, we will also be able to provide trends to individual chapters so they are able to see where they may be succeeding or falling short in areas such as recruitment, retention, operating standards met, and areas of operational deficiency. We currently can provide data for the previous semester or year, so our hope is that our chapters will be able to create much more strategic programming for their future growth with three- to five-year trends.

We also hope by engaging campus professionals, alumni, and other organizations, it will provide the opportunity for better partnerships in the future. This will allow for these individuals to provide feedback for us to improve our operations, facilitate at conferences, gain better insight into the operations of Lambda Chi Alpha, and continue to help all of our organizations improve fraternity/sorority life as a whole.

We look forward to continuing to engage our alumni, campus partners, and other fraternity and sorority professionals through the CORE Program! If you are interested in learning more about the CORE Program, or would like to assist in the future, please email Associate Director of Chapter Services Nathan Schultz at nschultz@lambdachi.org.

Chris Pockette serves as the Director of Chapter Services for Lambda Chi Alpha Fraternity where he oversees the health and development of Lambda Chi Alpha chapters and colonies across North America. Chris has worked with Lambda Chi Alpha in a variety of different roles, including traveling as a consultant for the fraternity for two years, since he graduated from UNC Charlotte in 2015.

Nathan Schultz serves as the Associate Director of Chapter Services for Lambda Chi Alpha Fraternity where he oversees consultant training and visitation across North America, as well as the entirety of the CORE program. Nathan served Lambda Chi Alpha as a consultant for a year and a half after graduating from Edinboro University in 2017 and has served in his current role since the beginning of 2019.