

How to Approach Conversations with Your Students Considering Fraternity & Sorority Life as a Career Path

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Hi, we're Dana and Abby! Dana is an incoming first year and Abby is a second year student in the higher education student affairs (HESA) program at Indiana University-Bloomington. We are co-graduate assistants in the Student Life and Learning office and both serve as fraternity and sorority advisors. We hope this article will help provide perspective about what professionals can do to help guide prospective graduate students through the graduate school application process as well as serve as a resource professionals can share with those they work with – current students, mentees, or consultants – when the topic of graduate school is put on the table.

Both of us found our way to IU for graduate school, but took different paths to get there. After Dana graduated with her Bachelor's degree at Boston University, she worked at Sigma Kappa Sorority as a leadership consultant for two years. Abby decided to attend graduate school right after completing her Bachelor's degree from Florida State University. Both of us were lucky enough to have phenomenal mentors to help us through the graduate school search process. Some of the questions our mentors used to help guide and challenge our application process include:

- **What type of institution do you want to work/study at?** (Private, public, small, large, mid-sized, big athletics school, liberal arts, etc.) After attending large institutions as undergraduates, we both decided applying to large institutions would best fit our needs for the graduate school experiences we were looking to gain.
- **What type of assistantship opportunities do you want to pursue?** (i.e., is it important to have full tuition remission? Do you want to attend an institution where assistantships are guaranteed or required? What type of support do you want the institution to provide in the assistantship search?)
- **Is Fraternity and Sorority Life (FSL) where you want to “live” in graduate school?** While your mentees are likely passionate about their undergraduate experiences in the fraternal community, they need to consider if they want to continue working in this functional area or explore a different niche of higher education. And if they do want to work in FSL, what type of sorority and fraternity community do they want to work with (size of community/recruitment, history, “competitiveness,” investment of resources from university/administrators)? When thinking about the assistantships we were interested in, both of us experienced some determent from wanting to have a fraternity/sorority life graduate assistantship. Abby wanted to work in FSL from the beginning, but she was told to consider other options because many FSL professionals don't always have graduate assistantships in the realm of FSL. Dana was told to explore

other options because she could pigeonhole herself to be in fraternity/sorority life forever after her consultant experience.

- **What type and size of staff do you want experience working alongside?**
- **What location would you be most comfortable in/want more experience in?** Take time to consider if you want to be in a urban or rural area. Consider venturing to a completely different place than you've ever lived before to gain an array of experiences!

When beginning the graduate school search process, it's important to take all of these factors into consideration. There are numerous assistantship opportunities and a plethora of graduate programs out there, so encourage your mentees to create a list of needs, wants, and non-negotiables in order to help them find a graduate experience that is the best fit for them. Ultimately, it was important for Dana to have a very different experience than her undergraduate institution – a private, urban research institution where fraternity and sorority life was not prioritized by administrators – in order to broaden her scope of experiences. For Abby, it was important to her to be at a large institution with a large fraternity and sorority community filled with kind people who wanted to see her grow as a professional, and ultimately, have the opportunity to graduate from the same institution as her mother.

The following resource list can be shared with mentees as they consider their future graduate programs:

- [NASPA directory](#)
- Facebook groups: [Student Affairs Professionals](#), [Future Student Affairs Professionals](#), [NASPA Fraternity and Sorority Knowledge Community](#)
- People to Have Conversations With:
 - Student affairs professionals
 - FSL professionals
 - Current students in the programs you are applying to
 - Family and friends (they can be great resources when determining what you need/want out of your experience!)
- Identify and utilize your mentors (great for advice on interviewing, resume critiques, and cheering you on throughout the entire process)
 - How to identify a mentor: someone in a role you admire or hope to hold one day, someone who is able to provide you with praise and constructive feedback, a supervisor, someone in a similar field/role

Current FSL professionals can help their graduate-school seeking mentees and students prepare for the graduate school interview process by conducting mock interviews with questions they would ask of a prospective student and/or FSL assistantship holder. Once they begin the interview process, encourage your mentees to take note of their initial impressions of the offices and institutions they interact with. We are both relationship-oriented people, so this is something we both paid close attention to while interviewing and visiting different institutions. It was important for us to have positive relationships with the professionals we would be working with, the faculty we would interact with, and our potential future cohort mates. We

found ourselves paying close attention to how everyone was interacting, and taking a step back to envision if we could truly see ourselves growing and learning both within the environment and from the people we would interact with on a daily basis. Graduate school can be tough, so it is important to think about the qualities that are most important to you in your relationships with others, and consider what type of support you will need in order to thrive.

Our respective journeys demonstrate there are no two like paths to a Higher Education Master's program, nor is there one "right" way to navigate your way to an assistantship in FSL. Ultimately, the feedback, support, and mentorship we received from current and past professionals was a critical part of our graduate school search and application process. When current professionals are able to share their wisdom, experiences, and feedback with current and undergraduate students, they are investing in the next generation of our field. We are grateful for the professionals who shared wisdom with us throughout our search and hope our experience is one that other students will be able to have in the future too!