

**The Dreaded Theory Question:
Acing your Interview by Connecting Theory to Practice**

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"How do you incorporate student development theory in your work with fraternities and sororities?" Admit it, you have been preparing for that interview question since your first student development theory class in graduate school, right? While you may not be able to recite each stage, vector, level, or phase of every theory you have learned, you immediately think of numerous situations in which you felt the interconnectedness between the knowledge you gained in the classroom and your practical experiences within an Office of Fraternity and Sorority Life. After all, student development theory helps you understand why students do the things they do with regard to student attitudes, behaviors, thoughts, and beliefs. Theory offers "...a lens through which to view students and helps educators put student behavior in context rather than simply being perplexed by it" (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton & Renn, 2010, p. 26). Even if the interviewer did not ask you the *dreaded theory question*, you had planned multiple ways of weaving student development theory into your interview anyway, demonstrating your practical ability to utilize theory on a daily basis working with fraternity and sorority members.

Nevitt Sanford's (1967) Theory of Challenge and Support is a useful tool when determining students' readiness to take on new leadership roles within their chapters or on a governing council. Students grow and develop when they are challenged but must have an appropriate level of support to rise to that challenge. Your advising style uniquely combines challenge and support as you build relationships with and provide guidance to each individual student leader. You may choose to touch on Nancy Schlossberg's (1989) theory of Mattering and Marginality, having worked with a student leader to help him feel as though he mattered to you, to his fraternity brothers, and to the national organization when he took an unpopular stance against a long-standing chapter tradition of hazing. Providing this student leader with feelings of being appreciated and cared about, as well as the sense others were proud of the stance he took, allowed him to positively continue his involvement and development within his fraternity.

Focusing on recruitment and retention of chapter members, you might discuss Goodman, Schlossberg and Anderson's (2006) concept of "moving in, moving through, and moving out" as components of the transition process, emphasizing the multiple transitions which take place throughout fraternity and sorority membership - joining an organization, moving into a chapter facility, becoming a big brother or big sister, taking on chapter leadership roles, and transitioning to alumni status. Highlighting the 4 S's as "...factors that influence one's ability to cope with a transition: situation, self, support, and strategies," you might discuss the importance and relevancy of new member education programs and membership development opportunities, as well as graduating senior programs, within each chapter on campus (Evans et al, p. 216).

An area of particular interest to you personally and professionally relates to how national and local fraternal organizations are adapting with respect to under-represented student populations. You wonder about how transgender, gender queer, and LGB students experience fraternal life on your campus. Recently you have been studying a number of identity theories and concepts related to gender and sexual orientation for a presentation at the next Greek leadership retreat (Beemyn, 2004; Bilodeau, 2009; D'Augelli, 1994; Lev, 2004). Your colleague will be speaking about a variety of racial and ethnic identity development theories because more students of color and multi-racial students are enrolling in your institution and thus exploring fraternity and sorority membership (Cross & Fhagen-

Smith, 2001; Gallegos & Ferdman, 2012; Helms, 1990; Holvino, 2012; Horse, 2012; Kim, 2001; Phinney, 2007; Renn, 2003; Torres, 2003). With growing membership in the National Pan-Hellenic and Multicultural Greek Council chapters, as well as increasing racial and ethnic diversity within the Interfraternity Council and Panhellenic Association chapters, you have experienced the value of intentional cross-council discussions on the social justice concepts of intent versus impact, the Pile on Principle, as well as in-group and out-group language (Cullen, 2008). Helping all students understand and appreciate the intersectionality and simultaneity of their different identities is not only a professional value, but you believe this understanding and appreciation will be transformational to the fraternity and sorority community (Holvino, 2012).

During the interview, you also want to convey your experience in effectively handling the negative decisions and behaviors of fraternity and sorority members through your role as the advisor to the All-Greek Hearing Board, which hears fraternity and sorority organization conduct violations. Drawing on both Kohlberg's Theory of Moral Development and Gilligan's Theory of Women's Moral Development, you have provided guidance to the hearing board members to understand how students make moral and ethical decisions on a developmental continuum, including how to apply effective sanctions which encourage advancement through moral development stages (Kohlberg, Levin, & Hower, 1984; Gilligan, 1993). These theories have also proven useful when helping individual chapter leaders understand the importance of their organization's risk management policies, sometimes educating from a legal liability perspective and other times educating from the principle of care and concern for the safety of others, depending on the moral developmental level of the leaders in the training.

As excited as you are about this new Fraternity and Sorority Life position, you are conflicted because you have supported your current council leadership through Tuckman's (1965) stages of forming, storming, norming, and performing, but are not quite ready for the most recently added stage, adjourning. Your leaders have been operating at high efficiency levels and displaying unity in both purpose and goals. However, the upcoming implementation of a new community housing policy, which prohibits the presence of alcohol in chapter facilities, will surely send the group back to storming, especially considering the close vote total at the last council meeting. Recently, the chapter facilities participated in an environmental scan to evaluate messages and activities which support high risk drinking and substance use. Recommendations have been made utilizing the Campus Ecology model that behavior is a function of the person interacting with the environment, and you are eager to assist the council leadership in responding to the recommendations to intervene and substitute positive messages of health, safety, and taking care of one another within the fraternal community (Banning, 1978).

At the conclusion of your campus interview, you have one final opportunity to demonstrate your knowledge and experience with student development theory. You conclude by sharing a personal story of self-authorship, explaining how you utilized the "...three elements of self-authorship: trusting the internal voice, building an internal foundation, and securing internal commitments" when deciding to apply for the position (Baxter Magolda, 2008; Evans et al. 2010, p. 186). This new Fraternity and Sorority Life job is exciting and provides an opportunity to develop new skills, broaden your portfolio of experiences, and boost your student affairs career, while supporting students' transformational journey to becoming responsible, educated, global citizens of the world. Not even the *dreaded theory question* could sway you away from this opportunity.

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