How Cultural Competence Shapes Our Work, or Should with Culturally-based Fraternal Organizations

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"Knuck If You Buck" blasts through the speakers of the student center making it the second time that night that the bass heavy song vibrated through the excited crowd. The first time was during one of the sororities step show performances, right after they called out several organizations in attendance. There is a different energy in the space now, as this time, it's a fraternity who started strolling eleven deep through the aisles accidently bumping into a small group of young men. One of the fraternity chapter's represented are excited because the last time anyone saw them they were a chapter of one. As part of the "preparation" for the fraternity chapter's performance, some younger grad chapter members were discreetly distributing the special fraternity "juice" in water bottles to members throughout the night. The undergraduate chapter members, now eleven deep, started strolling through the aisles. They accidently bumped into the DJ's entourage, a small group of young men, as they were headed out of the auditorium to take their place "on deck" to compete. However, they never made it backstage because a couple members of the DJ's entourage started mouthing off. Tensions were already high as both this fraternity and their "sister" sorority were two of the group's called out during the earlier performance when the song was played. Undoubtedly, the music, "juice," and dissing influenced the physical altercation that quickly escalated in the overcrowded event. In less than 15 minutes what started as a lively campus event, abruptly ended in an all-out brawl and a campus-based professional's nightmare. What do you do?

Cultural Competence in Action
Dissing, city-wide chapters, and alcohol at step shows. To an untrained eye it may be hard to read between the lines, leaving an unclear assessment of what course of action to take in the above scenario. Understanding the basic legal issues regarding risk management is vital to the foundation of knowledge for every fraternity/sorority professional. So, how does cultural competence play a role? Bourdieu (1986) states cultural capital is an element in discerning an individual's social standing within organizations. Whether we have cultural capital can impact our students and other attendees' willingness to listen and our capacity to respond. Our work with culturally-based fraternal organizations is first shaped by our own cultural competence. Understanding this aspect of ourselves provides a different lens to guide our work with culturally-based fraternal organizations – relationship-building, engagement at all levels, and ability to advocate.

For many fraternity/sorority professionals, cultural competence, social justice, and inclusion were not infused within our graduate program curriculum. Depending upon the fraternal communities to which one is exposed as an undergraduate and/or graduate student, one may have a high learning curve when it comes to working with culturally-based fraternal organizations (CBFOs). Pope, Reynolds, and Mueller (2004) outline three essential steps in developing multicultural competence:

1. Acquiring appreciation, knowledge, and understanding of cultural groups.
2. Increasing content knowledge about important culturally related terms and concepts.

3. Enhancing awareness of one's own biases and cultural assumptions, and assessing one's own multicultural skills and comfort level.

We believe the level of cultural competence one has directly correlates to his/her ability to identify effective strategies for controlling and limiting risk in CBFOs, their events, and the added consideration of overlapping liability with graduate chapter activities. Many CBFOs "road trip" for step shows, work with promoters for "after-parties," invite neighboring chapters to new member shows, and visit other campuses for similar purposes. Cultural competence shapes our ability to meaningfully engage with our CBFO members and design effective educational programming. It also creates the foundation for a more inclusive fraternal community.

Defining the Uniqueness of CBFOs
Beginning with the introduction of National Pan-Hellenic Council member groups, culturally-based fraternal organizations (CBFOs) were born out of a different context. Historically, African-American/Black students were unable to join the traditionally-White fraternities/sororities present on campuses across the country (Jones, 2004). Therefore, underrepresented students created their own fraternal organizations committed to the preservation of identity, celebration of culture, and development of overall support networks. In truth, even after their first inception, many campus-based professionals at Predominately White Institutions (PWIs) did not understand how to service CBFOs. It is imperative to also remember most of the students involved in CBFOs were underrepresented on the campus and faced institutional challenges both inside and outside the classroom on an individual level. These similarities and relationships between the organizations, and their members, coupled with a shared experience of feeling marginalized at PWIs created an environment for cultural exchange. In their beginnings, CBFOs shared benefits from each other's experiences. Muñoz and Guardia (2009) offer, "Personal friendships with Latino Greek and some Black Greek Fraternity members became pivotal as was their willingness to share whatever they could about how their organizations were started, how they defined their uniqueness and official university standing and how they programmed." The differences established a distinct culture within CBFOs impacting how they approached recruitment, pledging, social enrichment, and advocacy were unique from their peers.

This historical context shapes our understanding of the systemic issues on a particular campus, and within the larger community. There are still alumni members in graduate chapters who share their experiences with newly initiated members. The culture of CBFOs is such that the relationship between alumni (graduate chapter) and undergraduate members is tightly-coupled. These unique differences inevitably impact how CBFOs function. CBFOs and their events must be considered through a different cultural lens. With this added cultural lens, campus-based professions should consider the procedural infrastructure differences like graduate/undergraduate chapter dynamics and balance them with the substantive content differences like a more proactive, focused response to social justice in the community.

Unity Not Uniformity
Utilizing a one-size-fits-all model for risk management education is minimally effective in addressing the needs of CBFOs. Balancing tight budgets and small chapters must be measured against the unintentional marginalization of CBFO communities. Yet again, cultural competence

shapes our work in advocacy and education for our CBFO communities. Often, external speakers for risk management topics are ill-prepared to address the complexities of CBFOs. Whether related to sexual misconduct prevention, event management, or general risk management, the examples used and images displayed may not include a cultural lens. As a result, your CBFO community members may leave feeling like because they did not glean insight into specific challenges they face in their respective communities.

Hazing prevention is a topic where this misstep is often magnified. For example, a hazing prevention speaker may be an expert presenting from an IFC/Panhellenic lens, relating to the majority of the community on your campus. However, the way in which hazing manifests, and potential involvement of alumni within the process, present unique aspects for consideration if prevention efforts are going to be effective for CBFOs. When vetting speakers, inquire about their work with diverse audiences. Determine if there is a need to do some small group work with each council, as opposed to having them all together. Another alternative is to reach out to regional officers of CBFOs and ask for recommendations for presenters who can adequately address their membership. When budgets permit, find different speakers who can address diverse communities in more inclusive environments.

From a policy and procedure frame, consider your university travel policy as it relates to "road tripping." What constitutes a chapter "event" versus a few members headed out of town together? What access to university vehicles do student organizations have on campus? These are all questions to consider when educating your CBFO community and examining your policies and procedures to ensure they are not creating feelings of bias or being "left out" because they do not have the financial capital or infrastructure to utilize certain resources.

Additionally, CBFOs often use larger events as fundraisers for themselves, resulting in their desire to employ significant cost-cutting strategies. Additionally, there is a desire to maximize the number of attendees. This approach may lead to shortcuts in their event management plan – hiring a DJ who is not bonded or insured, co-hosting events with a local club for a portion of the cover charge, using student athletes or older non-financially current members in the area as security – resulting in an increase in their liability exposure. Again, having an appreciation for the entrepreneurial and familial framework in which CBFOs often operate increases the opportunities for proactive conversations. Ultimately, you want to ensure the safety and security of the overall community, not disenfranchise or disproportionately impact CBFOs. Cultural competence shapes how we approach achieving this goal – unity is not uniformity.

Increasing Your Cultural Credit
Attending CBFO events, meeting with graduate chapter/alumni members and learning the history – of the organizations themselves, the local background at your institution, and their inclusion in your overall community – better positions you to serve as a more impactful advocate in policy discussions with administrators and creating a more inclusive community. This strategic approach is important in developing an understanding of the intent behind the actions or requests of CBFOs. These elements foster trust with CBFO members. Look to long-term community building to establish and sustain "good" cultural credit. Navigating risk management principles, from road trips to step shows, will ultimately empower you to create a more comprehensive framework and infrastructure, which in turn will produce more inclusive communities. Pursue

these action items fearlessly, utilizing courage to overcome areas where you may be hesitant of your own knowledge and understanding. Remember cultural competence is a journey, not a destination; but, its significance in shaping our work with CBFOs is immeasurable.

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