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Student Involvement

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Highlights of New Information and Best Practices

I truly enjoyed the privilege to be able to attend the Association of Fraternity Advisors Annual Meeting. At the conference, I was able to attend several educational sessions, two keynote speakers, and learned even more through having numerous conversations with fellow professionals and other nationally distinguished leaders in the fraternity and sorority community. Below, I have organized into general subject areas highlights of what I have learned from my experiences at the conference.

On the National Pan-Hellenic Council...

- Administrators should learn to see NPHC for its capabilities and not only for its shortcomings
- First impressions of our department were already made by our predecessors, and may work to our advantage or disadvantage
- Miseducation and non-education about other councils and chapters leads to poor relationships, separatism, and underground activity
- Community must first be built within council, then with other councils
- Every semester is a new community
- Understand that especially within this community, students wear many hats and are under much pressure
- Learning “NPHC Greek vocabulary” (e.g. nupe, neo, sands, wood, que, line, paper) and organizational histories helps to create relationships and understand what is going on

On Culturally-Based Fraternities and Sororities...

- “Historically younger organizations have not been able to check their egos at the door” Meaning that it is often harder to change the culture of emerging organizations and more difficult to close their problematic chapters
- Creating a resource manual for culturally based councils that includes information on council history, basic council functions, policies, resolutions, chapter histories, and other useful materials including basic chapter functions will help provide much needed infrastructure and institutional memory
- “Inclusion not invitation” The key to community building across organizations and councils is through sincerity and depth of interaction
- Shared values and standards are what should define and unify councils, not skin color
- Students join to develop their cultural identities as well as their person
- Statistically, the national growth of culturally based fraternities and sororities is not sustainable

On Judicial Affairs & Accountability...

- Students today feel the need to negotiate everything, need to be talked through decisions, and do not deal well with being denied
- A nurtured sense of self-confidence can translate into self-righteousness
- Understanding the difference between male and female communication styles is key
- Millennials often believe that the world is rosier than it is, and so may not believe problems exist when confronted
- Create a student standards board to allow for peer review of lower level conduct issues but with Fraternity and Sorority Life and Student Conduct and Ethical Development oversight
- Draft press releases often to share successes and failures openly with the school newspaper

On the Creation of a Parents Council...

- A Parents Council can be extremely helpful in acquiring resources and creating accountability
- A letter and handouts geared towards parents that explains policies and expectations of students involved with fraternities and sororities helps create allies
- Recruitment should focus on parents and students simultaneously and emphasize parent involvement
- Invite parents to participate in Greek educational series as presenters
- Hosting events specifically for parents of affiliated students and inviting parents to all-Greek events helps to create involvement

Hazing

- “Hidden Harm” concept – students do not often consider what type of emotional/psychological baggage a fellow student has before hazing them
- The average age for the onset of mental health issues is around 18-22, creating need to educate students who will be educating fellow students
- Students need a sense of accomplishment in their membership process and hazing provides students with a false sense of accomplishment
- Administrators can be a resource to help create positively challenging experiential learning opportunities
- Target specific individuals to combat hazing: e.g. Create a “train the trainer” program to give knowledge of policies and possible activity ideas to those who are directly in contact with incoming members
- Ropes courses and camping trips provide a good alternative and the university can begin a partnership with outdoor activities companies to offer students examples

How will you incorporate this new information into your position and department?

Considering all that I have learned from my experience at AFA, there are a number of ideas that I would like to make a part of fraternity and sorority life at SJSU. First, I believe that our office and our councils must collaborate to create a set curriculum for incoming fraternity and sorority members. The program should be a comprehensive introductory program to the fraternity and sorority experience and should include topics such as policies, expectations, council and chapter histories, academics, risk management, and values actualization. The creation of resource manuals for developmental activities, retreat sites, and icebreakers would be helpful to help students revise pledge programs that may contain elements that may be considered hazing. A manual should be created for our USFC council that includes council history, basic council functions, policies, resolutions, chapter histories, and other useful materials as they are our only non-national council and do not have such a resource. This conference has also led me to consider a constituency previously overlooked: parents. I would definitely like to reach out to parents to help towards accountability, additional resources, and a stronger community tie to SJSU. After witnessing the lack of information about culturally-based organizations, I have also come to understand that I can be of service to the entire fraternal movement as a professional with a culturally-based fraternal experience working at a university with four functioning councils. I would like to do more speaking at campuses and conferences and would like to invite other colleagues to observe and learn from SJSU as it develops into a true fraternal community.

How will your participation contribute to student learning at SJSU?

Brotherhood/sisterhood, personal development, academics, and community service are the most basic of all fraternal values, and participation in this conference has given me the knowledge and best practices to better guide students to live these values and learn from their experiences. Knowledge gained on how parents can be a good resource will hopefully help to acquire funding and presenters to enrich the student experience. Knowledge gained about cross-council community building will help students to thrive and achieve common goals in a truly diverse and close-knit microcosm of society.

How will you share the results of your experience with colleagues in the Division of Student Affairs?

I will be presenting a selected topic from the conference at one of our Student Involvement staff meetings and invite anyone from the division to attend. If anyone is particularly interested in any of the topics that I have outlined after reading this report, I would be more than happy to go more in depth on a one-on-one basis as well.

Is there a website where interested staff could learn more information about this particular professional development activity?

Much more information can be found at the Association of Fraternity Advisors website www.fraternityadvisors.org.