

## Chapter XIV

# High Performing Fraternities and Sororities

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### INTRODUCTION

There is a Jekyll-Hyde quality to social fraternities and sororities. Since their inception, fraternal organizations have aimed and claimed to enrich the quality of undergraduate life on college and university campuses by providing opportunities for intellectual, social, and leadership development of their members (Anson & Marchesani, 1991). But many of the studies of the fraternity and sorority experience over the past fifteen years, especially of men's groups, paint a different picture (Bowker, 1994; Pascarella, et al., 1996; Stomblor & Martin, 1994; Weschler, 1996; Weschler, Kuh & Davenport, 1996). On balance, the literature points to a substantial gap between the espoused purposes of fraternal groups and what their members actually do in terms of social behavior and, to a somewhat lesser extent, academic performance. Some have gone so far as to conclude that social fraternity and sorority communities are antithetical to the educational purposes of undergraduate study (Maisel, 1990; Philips, 1999; St range, 1986).

For these and other reasons, fraternal organizations are being forced to adjust to changing times and expectations. The substantial physical plant investment in fraternity and sorority housing facilities is one compelling reason to try to improve the quality of the social fraternal experience. As membership rolls decline, the pressure intensifies for individual groups to find ways to appeal to potential members and fill the house. More importantly, most campuses with fraternal communities have one or more strong individual chapters, groups where their members are living up to many of the ideals expressed in their charters. With that prospect in mind, it behooves college and university administrators, faculty members, governing boards, and others to improve all chapters and make participating in fraternal organizations a developmentally powerful experience for more members (Kuh,

1982). The challenge is to raise the bar of organizational performance to enhance the fraternal experience generally and improve the overall quality of undergraduate education on those campuses.

But to "bring up the floor" so to speak, we must have a vision of what strong, vibrant fraternal communities look like. To successfully address a challenge of this magnitude and importance, it's helpful to have models of effective practice—descriptions of strong performing fraternal communities from which other fraternal organizations can learn. Such an approach to improvement is common in both the profit and not-for-profit sectors. Discovering the salient properties of effective fraternal communities will inform efforts to transport and adapt the relevant features to other campuses, fraternal communities, and individual chapters.

Toward this end, this chapter summarizes what is known about high performing fraternal systems. First, there is a brief review of what is known about the effects of fraternity and sorority membership on desired outcomes of college. One would expect that membership in a high performing group would have numerous positive benefits consistent with the espoused goals of fraternal living. Then we describe in some detail the characteristics of high-performing fraternal communities at two universities. We conclude with recommendations for student affairs practitioners, the professional staff of fraternal organizations, and their volunteers.

### **What the Literature Says about the Benefits of Being in a Fraternity or Sorority**

Over the past four decades dozens of papers have been published about the impact of fraternity and sorority membership on student learning and personal development. However, studies of the relationship between fraternal organizations membership and student development from multiple campuses are especially rare with a few notable exceptions (Astin, 1977, 1993; Pascarella, et al. 1996, Pascarella, et al. 2001). In addition, no published studies of which we are aware of attempt to estimate or compare the impact of membership in different chapters on student outcomes or attempt to compare members for fraternal groups from one campus to another. Thus, in this section we briefly summarize key findings about the fraternity and sorority experience for individual students.

### **The Ideals of Fraternal Life**

What are the desired outcomes of the fraternal organization experience? We can fashion a reasonable description based on statements by the fraternal groups:

The College Fraternity "stimulates the ambition of its members; to prepare them for the greatest usefulness in the cause of human-

ity, freedom, and dignity of the individual; to encourage the highest and noblest form of manhood; and to aid downtrodden humanity in its efforts to achieve higher social, economic, and intellectual status." (Alpha Phi Alpha, 2001). It stands for excellence in scholarship. It recognizes that culture goes hand in hand with education and therefore seeks to broaden the growth of the member of encouraging the acquisition of knowledge and training in cultural subjects. The college fraternity accepts its role in the moral and spiritual development of the individual. It seeks to develop the social graces, the art of good living, the development of courtesy and kindness. Recognizing the importance of physical well being, the college fraternity aims for a sound mind in a sound body. It assumes civic responsibility and the chapter house is the training ground for good citizenship. A college fraternity seeks to develop the qualities of human understanding, of compassion, of companionship, of kindness and with a knowledge and training that appraises the basic values of life leading toward a better civilization with peace and understanding among all peoples. (North American Interfraternity Conference, 2001).

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The fraternity undergraduate members stand for good scholarship, for the guarding of good health, for wholehearted cooperation with the college's ideals for student life, for the maintenance of fine social standards, and for the serving of the college community . . . The Fraternity women of America stand for preparation for service through the character building inspired by the close contact and deep friendship of fraternity life. To us, fraternity life is not the enjoyment of special privileges but an opportunity to prepare for wide and wise human services. (National Panhellenic Conference, 2001).

About 650 campuses nationwide host social fraternal organizations. Although most of these groups were founded miles and years apart with rituals crafted to express unique purposes and goals, the ideals of these organizations are, for the most part, similar. Virtually all claim to provide an affinity group and living environment within which individual members can realize their own educational and personal objectives while at the same time contributing something meaningful to a larger organization that supports individual and group achievement. More specifically, such groups claim to provide opportunities for leadership, campus and community service, and the overall betterment of their host institution (Astin, 1993; Kuh, 1982). Implicit throughout these goals is a commitment to achievement at the highest levels in all spheres of individual and group life, including academic, personal, social, and so on.

Based on these statements we would expect that members of social fraternal organizations would show better-than-average gains in in-

tellectual, moral, and social development. Because of the multiple opportunities to take on leadership roles in the chapter and house environment we might also expect that members of fraternities and sororities would be more involved in substantive leadership positions.

### What the Research Says

Two streams of research are relevant to understanding the influence of the social fraternal organization experience on student learning and personal development. The first is the effective educational practices paradigm; the second is the college outcomes literature.

#### *Engagement in Effective Educational Practices*

The guiding concept for this perspective is that students who devote more time and effort to educationally purposeful activities benefit more from attending college (Astin, 1984; Chickering & Gamson, 1987; Pace, 1990; Kuh, 2001). Such activities include studying, reading and writing, interacting with faculty members and peers on substantive matters, and participating in activities that require prolonged engagement, decision making and problem solving such as what is often experienced in group leadership.

Students who belong to fraternal organizations do not fare worse, and in many cases fare better than other students in terms of their levels of engagement in educationally effective practices (Hayek, Carini, O'Day, & Kuh, 2002). This is true almost across the board—from the amount of effort they put forth inside and outside the classroom (including experiences and exposure to diversity), to interactions with faculty members and peers, to self-reported gains in various educational and personal growth areas, and to perceptions of the campus environment. This overall favorable fraternal engagement effect generally applies to men and women as well as first-year and senior students, but to a lesser extent those who live in the fraternity or sorority house (Hayek et al., 2002). In addition, being a member of a fraternity or sorority is positively correlated with persistence (Astin, 1977, 1984), higher levels of alumni giving (Nelson, 1985), and participation in extracurricular activities including leadership positions (Kuh, 1995; Schuh, Triponey, Heim, & Nishimura, 1992).

There are two highly publicized negative behaviors associated with being a member of a fraternal organization: higher incidents of binge drinking (Wechsler, Kuh, & Davenport, 1996) and academic dishonesty (McCabe & Bowers, 1996). Both of these tend to characterize male groups more than female groups.

#### *College Outcomes*

The second stream of pertinent research is the college outcomes literature. We organize representative studies of outcomes associated

with fraternity and sorority membership using Kuh's (1993) five-category typology.

**Cognitive complexity** includes the capacity for reflective thought, critical thinking and intellectual flexibility. Fraternal affiliation apparently stunts intellectual development (Pike & Askew, 1990), especially for members in the first year of college, with the exception of men of color (Pascarella, Edison, Whitt, Nora, Hagedorn, & Terenzini, 1996).

**Knowledge acquisition and application** includes understanding and relating knowledge to daily life. Studies of fraternities and sororities are not conclusive in this area. It appears that sorority membership may be positively related to achievement (Pascarella, Flowers, & Whitt, 2001), while fraternity membership is either neutral or perhaps negative (Astin, 1993; Center for the Study of the College Fraternity, 1982, 1992; Pascarella et al., 2001; Pike & Askew, 1990).

**Humanitarianism** includes an understanding and appreciation of human differences. The findings here, too, are somewhat mixed. Fraternity men have less exposure to people from different racial and ethnic backgrounds (Pike, 2000) and are less open to diversity (Pascarella et al., 1996). However, Hayek et al. (in press) concluded that fraternal organization members were more likely to interact with people from different backgrounds.

**Interpersonal and intrapersonal competence** represents a coherent integrated constellation of personal attributes and skills. Again the results are mixed. Fraternity and sorority-affiliated students are less autonomous and place a lower value on autonomy and personal independence than their non-Fraternity and sorority counterparts (e.g., Hughes & Winston, 1987; Winston & Saunders, 1987; Wilder et al., 1986). Men who join fraternities may have lower levels of moral reasoning at the start of college compared with those who do not join (Baier & Whipple, 1990; Sanders, 1990; Wilder, Hoyt, Surbeck, Wilder & Carney, 1986). Sorority members have lower moral reasoning scores after two years of college than their non-Fraternity and sorority counterparts (Kilgannon & Erwin, 1992). However, Cohen (1982) and Marlow and Auvenshine (1982) found no differences between members and non-members in the area of moral reasoning. Whether these are socialization effects of fraternal organizations or due primarily to background characteristics of students is difficult to untangle.

**Practical competence** is manifested by a capacity to manage one's personal affairs and to be self-sufficient and vocationally competent. Fraternal organizations' members spend more time in extracurricular activities (Hayek et al., in press) and say their involvement in co-curricular activities and leadership roles contribute to a host of desired outcomes including career preparation (Kuh, 1995). There is no evidence to the contrary so we should take their self-reports seriously.

## Summary

Though members of fraternal organizations engage as much or more in educationally purposeful activities during college, the evidence comparing fraternity and sorority members to their non-fraternity and sorority counterparts in terms of desired outcomes is mixed to negative. The negative effects of fraternal membership seem to be greatest in the first year, and then diminish (Pascarella, Flowers, & Whitt, 2001). Some of the mixed findings may be attributed to undesirable behaviors and circumstances associated with fraternities including discipline problems, legal liabilities, injuries, deaths, sexual assaults, racism, poor scholarship, and alcohol and substance abuse (Baier & Whipple, 1990).

As colleges and universities and national fraternal organizations work with individual chapters to address the behaviors and cultural trappings of social fraternal organizations that dampen the quality of the fraternal experience, it's imperative to also examine the larger context in which individual chapters exist, especially the fraternal system itself. With this in mind, we now turn to what an educationally effective fraternal system looks like on a university campus.

## HIGH PERFORMING FRATERNAL ORGANIZATIONS / COMMUNITIES

To identify elements of a strong, educationally purposeful fraternal community, Jelke (2001) undertook a year-long qualitative study of fraternal systems at two universities considered to be high performing. Twelve high performing fraternal systems were identified by Zacker (2001) after polling university administrators and fraternity professionals to determine systems that provided their members with positive learning experiences and lived up to their espoused values and ideals.

After collecting additional information about these twelve institutions and their fraternal systems, Purdue University and the University of Miami were chosen for a more in-depth study. Six weeks were spent collecting data at each institution. Approximately 100 members of each university community were formally or informally interviewed. More than sixty-five relevant documents from each site (such as constitutions, mission statements, recruitment materials, etc.) were analyzed. Direct observations and participant observation methods were also utilized, depending on how much the researcher was allowed to participate in various events. Observations ranged from attending formal events to casual social contacts and were guided by the key issues emerging from the study.

Both fraternity and sorority communities and their chapters were studied and analyzed separately, first to identify their salient characteristics, practices and cultural properties. Then, this information was

analyzed across the two cases to distill common themes and patterns. After careful, systematic within- and cross-case analyses, six themes were found to characterize these two high performing fraternal communities. That is, at both universities it was clear that the fraternal community: (1) emphasized academics; (2) emphasized service; (3) emphasized leadership development; (4) emphasized character building; (5) was supported by the host institution, and (6) adapted to their external environment.

## Emphasis on Academics

The social fraternity experience at both schools was grounded in a strong academic base. Academic success was emphasized in the fraternal community at large, and most of the chapters readily endorse its importance. In addition, the university administration as well as others, including faculty and staff, reinforced this view. In a word, the environmental press of both schools seemed to place a strong emphasis on academic achievement, which is also borne out by campus statistics that showed that generally the GPAs of fraternity or sorority members were at or exceeded the campus average.

Contributing to the emphasis on academics was the fact that chapter leaders, governing councils, and university administrators closely monitored academic performance. Relevant information about individual member grades was provided to chapters and their advisors. Information about the academic performance of individual chapter members as well as aggregate chapter data were provided to, and reviewed with, chapter leaders and advisors. Furthermore, publishing chapter grades and rankings in recruitment materials and Websites as well as making them available to potential members, parents, the media, and other administrators, served to motivate chapters.

Also, very few social activities took place between Sunday and Wednesday on either campus. Most were scheduled between Thursday and Saturday. Chapter members noted that functions during the school week would yield few participants.

Finally, there was an accountability component at the chapter and community level that allowed leaders and administrators to identify and assist poorly performing individuals and chapters. One common practice was setting relatively high GPA requirements for membership (both initial and continuing), leadership positions, and participation in social and athletic events. Arguably, the key factor here was that academic guidelines were enforced, albeit more so at the university and governing council level than the chapter level, and by women's groups as contrasted with the men's groups.

External factors also played a role in creating an emphasis on academics for the fraternal system. Among these factors were the number of members on merit-based financial aid and scholarships, the

number of students attempting to enter highly selective majors, and the perception of students that their universities were academically challenging, which required them to study hard to succeed.

### Emphasis on Service

Both fraternity and sorority systems placed a great deal of importance on their chapters' involvement in service projects for the community. This is consistent with what others have found about thriving fraternal organizations in large institutions (Kuh & Lyons, 1990). At both campuses, members of both fraternities and sororities understood the difference between philanthropy (the raising of money for charity) and service (the hands-on assistance to those in need), seeing both as a way to "give back" to the community.

As a result, service and philanthropy were infused at all levels of both Purdue and the University of Miami's fraternal community. For example, system-wide service projects and philanthropy projects were coordinated yearly. Chapters planned and implemented both service and philanthropy projects, and encouraged individual members to do service on their own as well. In short, service was expected, a social fraternal norm, especially among the Panhellenic and NPHC groups.

The fraternal organizations and the universities helped perpetuate this emphasis on service and philanthropy. Fraternity and sorority advisors at both institutions emphasized the difference between service and philanthropy to chapter and council leaders, rigorously monitored service hours and money donated by chapter members, and challenged groups that they felt were not doing particularly well in the community service area. Public events to recognize exceptional service and philanthropic contributions were common, including correspondence with the headquarters of the general organization.

Both campuses intentionally tried to enlist cooperation of other university offices that work specifically with local community organizations. They were able to create a service project specifically for the fraternal organizations, like building low-income housing year-round at Purdue, or incorporating themselves with an existing all-campus service effort like the fraternal organizations do with *Hurricanes Help the Hometown* at the University of Miami.

Finally, and possibly most importantly, a strong emphasis on service and philanthropy emerged during recruitment and member development. Service and philanthropy are discussed at the recruitment and intake events for all the groups and with parents and prospective members at informational meetings. It was also a de facto requirement for continued membership in an organization. Members heard this message consistently from peers, leaders, alumni, advisors, and the administration.

### Emphasis on Leadership Development

Members of the social fraternal communities at Purdue and University of Miami had multiple opportunities and intentional guidance to help them develop as leaders. Many of these findings seem to parallel some of Kuh and Lyons' (1990, p. 25) conclusions that large institutions especially, "the presence of fraternities and sororities provides additional leadership positions and opportunities for students to embrace and be embraced by a sub-community of choice. On both campuses, individual chapters had a high ratio of leadership positions to members. They also had a disproportionate number of leaders in other campus organizations.

Many leaders of the fraternal community had forged good working relations with members of the university administration or faculty members, in addition to their Fraternity/Sorority Advisor or faculty advisor through work-study opportunities, mentor relationships, faculty assistant opportunities, or leadership positions outside of their organizations. These relationships helped to keep the espoused and enacted mission of the fraternal system in balance with the University's mission. As one fraternity member, who worked in the Dean of Students' office at the University of Miami explained, "When you hear the same message in different ways from lots of different people, it tends to stick in your mind more (Jelke, 2001, p.205).

The guidance of administrators was most needed during the time when student leaders needed to hold other leaders accountable for their actions. This was clearly the task with which the fraternity and sorority leaders at both institutions had the most difficulty. Still, leaders in both systems overcame these difficulties and were empowered and expected to deal with these confrontations. Most fraternal organization leaders at both schools also understood their multiple roles as educators, enforcers, and role models, and came into their organization with some leadership experience that allowed them to balance their many roles more readily.

Finally, there was a clear sense that these leaders had clarified their own and their group's values. Moreover, they were able to give examples of when they enacted those values as individuals, as a chapter, or as a system, and things they did to try to change behaviors that were not in line with those values.

The universities and fraternal communities intentionally influenced the leadership development of chapter members in many ways, allowing these members to augment their educational experience while at the university. Both campuses have a multi-tiered leadership development program for their fraternal communities that focus their attention on new members, general members, emerging leaders, chapter leaders, and council leaders. These programs deal with both practical

and theoretical/conceptual information. One Panhellenic Association (PHA) officer from the University of Miami noted, "We try to develop our members as leaders right from the start. Some don't develop as quickly and a few don't develop at all- but that is their choice. The opportunities are there for everyone" (Jelke, 2001, p.207). An Interfraternity Council (IFC) officer at Purdue added, "We definitely get to them early, and get to them often. No one can say they didn't have a chance to learn how to be a leader here" (Jelke, 2001, p.207) .

To complement the training for fraternity and sorority leaders, there were also practical opportunities to sharpen leadership skills by being involved. There were various leadership positions at the chapter, system, and campus level that younger members were encouraged to hold. Both communities had an informal process for leadership succession, and a communication line that announced leadership positions on campus and in other organizations and helped members of social fraternal organizations hold a disproportionate number of leadership positions in other organizations.

Other factors that participants in the study claimed help emphasize leadership development in these two fraternal communities included the regular distribution of information concerning other fraternal communities and general fraternity/sorority issues, the infusion of outside "experts" to facilitate and lead programs, the use of regional and inter/national awards criteria as goal-setting and assessment tools for councils and chapters, a university assisted officer transition program for council and chapter officers, and the expectation that new officers not merely maintain the status quo, but improve on the previous year's accomplishments and document those improvements.

Finally, both campuses have an extensive formal and informal recognition system in place for fraternity and sorority leaders. Positive reinforcement was frequent, contagious, but not trite. As a chapter president from the University of Miami noted, "We've learned to praise our members when they take on a responsibility and come through. It makes them feel important because we don't do it for insignificant things, and we do it from the heart" (Jelke, 2001, p.211). A sorority president from Purdue added, "It was more important to me that [the Assistant Dean of Students] came up to me and told me how impressed he was with me than for me to win that award. I know he doesn't do that all the time" (Jelke, 2001, p.211).

### **Emphasis on Character Building**

To a great extent, many members of these two social fraternal communities understood, articulated, and modeled their fraternal values and the collective espoused values of the social fraternal community. These values included academic achievement, social interaction, community service, respect for self and others, integrity, and loyalty to

each other and their alma mater. A smaller number of members were also able to connect these values to their behavior and the behavior of other members of the chapter and the community. Some members or groups were even enabled and empowered enough to intervene when individual or group actions went against the espoused values. This intervention became an expected norm in both communities. In the social fraternal community, the university, and the environment intentionally contributed to the character building of fraternity and sorority members.

Fraternal organizations at both universities were emphatic about the role of fraternal values in recruiting and retaining members. It is common to hear conversations or questions from chapter members and interested students alike about the importance of academics, leadership, or vice or leadership.

Both systems were influenced by council, university, and external national pressure into guiding their chapters into the "right way" of recruiting, emphasizing grades, philanthropy, camaraderie, leadership, and cost value as opposed to drinking, parties, meeting members, and women. The results of this pressure could be seen in most of the recruitment material that was given to potential members and parents. The presentations given at informational gatherings, the informal conversations that appeared on Websites. To be fair, it should be noted that not all participants accepted or adopted this method of recruitment. Some chapters and members merely followed along in order to not get into trouble. However, many of these groups went beyond merely changing the mantra of scholarship, service, and leadership. They effectively used values such as "SLAG (Service, Leadership, Academics, Grades, Men)," "Balanced Men (Leadership, Athletics, Scholarship, Grades, Men)" or Four S's (Sisterhood, Service, Scholarship, Spirit) as tangible guidelines to evaluate incoming members.

Equally important, many chapters also evaluated members using these types of guidelines in order to maintain active members throughout their undergraduate years. Holding members accountable for their actions helped to socialize members to enact espoused fraternal values. Accountability came from many sides: the university, the councils, and even from the chapters and their members. In general, leaders were expected to hold their peers accountable for their actions, and help in the character building process.

Realistically, the problems were not always confronted in a consistent manner by chapters, officers or members. In some instances, chapter officers themselves were involved in the inappropriate behavior. Typically these incidents involved underage drinking at social Purdue University fraternity functions, or in the enforcement differences between some fraternity and sorority on-campus and off-campus

functions at the University of Miami. It was common for campus based fraternity and sorority advisors at these institutions to step in and meet with the individual students who had shown disregard for fraternal values, and use these meetings as teachable moments. They intentionally used fraternal values as a part of those discussions. It was also common for these individuals or chapters to be brought up on charges through the university judicial system when the problems were not being confronted properly by the students themselves.

The two universities also had allies in their efforts to modify undesirable behavior—the media and the (inter) national headquarters. The local media scrutinized both social fraternal communities heavily. The university administrators who worked with the fraternity and sorority members were able to utilize this scrutiny as a teaching tool as well, especially in the area of integrity. Newspaper articles from campus, as well as news stories from around the country were distributed often to chapter and council leaders to point to the gap between espoused and enacted fraternal values and how that raised serious questions about fraternal integrity.

A partnership with individual organizations' (inter)national headquarters also helped the universities to strengthen character building through accountability. As the Associate Dean at the University of Miami explained, "There are times when a call from the headquarters can impact a chapter more than a call from the administration" (Jelke, 2001, p.216). It becomes another voice in the socialization process urging chapters to stick to their fraternal values. Students at both institutions regularly attended regional, national and international conferences and leadership institutes. They were able to hear more direct references to their specific fraternal values, and this reinforced the importance of congruency between espoused and enacted values.

### **Institutional Support**

Most students who participated in the study made reference to how the university support for their system was an important part of their success. One fraternity chapter president at Purdue said, "While I don't agree with everything the administration does, I believe they want us to do well. I think most of us [Fraternity and sorority students] believe that" (Jelke, 2001, p.217). Students at both institutions occasionally indicated that administrators made significant contributions to the effectiveness of their groups and the overall fraternal community.

Also, the campus based fraternity and sorority advisors at both schools had developed good working relationships with local law enforcement agencies, national organizations, umbrella groups, regional or national associations, and administrators at other institutions. Information was accumulated and disseminated more easily, the reac-

tion time for necessary actions became quicker, and the challenges were dealt with more collaboratively. Students and administrators at both campuses emphasized the importance of a well-trained, well-educated Fraternity and sorority advising team as a key part to the success of the systems. One sorority officer at Purdue commented:

It's no secret that we are much better off with [the Fraternity and sorority Advisor] here. From what I hear, we've always had a strong person in that role, but he is an important part of the Fraternity and sorority-University partnership. He may not do everything for us, but he is a tremendous resource. He may not know every answer, but he knows where we can find it. (Jelke, 2001, pp. 217-218)

### **Adapting to the External Environment**

There are several environmental factors that were similar at both fraternal communities and which contributed to the effectiveness of these communities. Noteworthy environmental factors that were similar included proximity to support groups, competitive interests or attractive alternatives to fraternal life on campus, and how the system and host institutions reacted to crises.

#### *Proximity to Resources and Support*

Purdue is located in rural Indiana, within approximately two hours of Chicago and Indianapolis. Many fraternity and sorority alumni have settled near the area and provide guidance and support for the chapters. The area is also home to many national and international headquarters, as well as the North American Interfraternity Conference, National Panhellenic Conference, and National Pan-Hellenic Council. These organizations have provided guidance and support for the chapters at Purdue, and their accessibility has allowed for these outside agents to be used as educational resources for the whole fraternal community. The University of Miami is located in Coral Gables in populous Miami-Dade County. Many fraternity and sorority alumni have also settled in this area and provide guidance and support for the chapters at the university. Furthermore, Miami is an accessible and desirable location for speakers, facilitators, and other people who have acted as resources for the fraternal community there.

#### *Attractive Alternatives*

Both campuses provided numerous programs, activities and campus life opportunities outside of the fraternal community. At the University of Miami, the "residential college" system provided excellent opportunities for social interaction, and formal and informal education. Even students in the fraternal community commented on how productive their time was in the residential colleges, and how the interaction with the professors and students they met there continued after they left their residences. There were also many other organizations on campus that students could join, many which competed d

rectly with fraternities and sororities for members. One NPHC fraternity member at Miami explained, "We sometimes have to go up against the Caribbean Students Association, or one of the other groups. It keeps us on our toes because we have to be at our best to attract these guys" (Jelke, 2002, p.220).

At Purdue University, the Co-operative Housing system provided students who were looking for a collegial live-in experience outside the residence halls with an alternative to joining a fraternal organization. While both the co-ops and the fraternal organizations claimed they were completely different entities, they provided similar experiences for the students at Purdue, and they tended to be mutually exclusive. Students who joined Co-ops were not members of social fraternal organizations, and vice-versa.

Purdue also had an extensive residence hall system, a well developed programming board, and many other events and opportunities for students to get involved on campus if they so desired. Not being the only show in town was something both social fraternal communities had in common, and students and administrators at both institutions insisted that the "competition" made them work harder to attract members.

#### *Reaction to Crises*

Both universities had experienced crises and used these situations as opportunities to make significant changes in policies, expectations, and as educational moments for members of the social fraternal communities. At the University of Miami it was an alleged rape at one of the fraternities; at Purdue it was a series of arrests at a fraternity party. Both situations attracted considerable attention from the media, the university, and surrounding community. And in both situations administrators and chapter leaders met to re-evaluate the role of the fraternal community on campus, and determined ways to intentionally realign the community with their espoused values and the institution's educational mission.

At both Miami and Purdue, the fraternal communities went through a period of crisis that included the loss of several chapters and members. The communities ultimately adapted to the new behavioral expectations, and began settling into a better understanding of their espoused values.

## CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Three conclusions were made in the Jelke (2001) study:

(1) The emphasis and reinforcement of key values of fraternal organizations that were congruent with the mission of the university was a factor in enabling these fraternal communities to become high performing. (2) The university's active guidance, crisis man-

agement, support and assistance seemed to also play a factor in the development of these high performing social fraternal communities. (3) With the aforementioned factors in play, environmental factors played a lesser role in hindering the effectiveness of the social fraternal communities, and were adapted to more readily by the communities. There are many parallels between these conclusions, and the findings in other studies. (pp. 232-233)

The clear, consistent, and coherent expression and enactment of the values and mission of the fraternal community attracted members with similar values and goals, allowed members to more readily understand behavioral expectations through anticipatory socialization, and provided a framework for informal and formal accountability processes. Each chapter promoted their own fraternal values, but also bought into the collective values shared by the whole community: leadership, scholarship, service, and character building.

These values were reinforced at several influential times for members of the organizations: recruitment; socialization; continuing education; and in accountability procedures. In addition, the universities took an active role in helping these organizations and fraternal communities reinforce the positive values they espoused. Institutional agents, including but not limited to student affairs staff, played key roles. Additionally, institutional agents demonstrated an understanding of the espoused values of their respective fraternal communities (and many individual chapters), and utilized this knowledge in their guidance process. These agents intentionally used language and modeled actions that helped reinforce appropriate behaviors, dissuade inappropriate behaviors, and help the members of the fraternal community make connections between their actions and the values they espouse as members of a fraternity or sorority.

These practices are consistent with those that characterized the 14 institutions described in the Involving Colleges study (Kuh, Schuchman, & Whitt et al., 1991). That is, the fraternal community at both Miami and Purdue made efforts to articulate and express their mission and values in recruitment and socialization practices, formal and informal induction activities, and in giving students responsibility for learning and maintaining community standards.

Kuh et al. (1991, p. 348) recommended that student affairs professionals become experts on their students, "how they learn, and the conditions that affect their development." By closely understanding the values, culture, and language of the fraternity and sorority members, the institutional agents charged with guiding those students at Purdue University and the University of Miami were able to make intentional contributions to their development, and facilitate high performance from the system. In the case of the University of Miami significant financial resources were also provided to enable the fraternal

system to pursue opportunities that might further value based behaviors. Members of the fraternal community, in turn, understood the university's role, and took seriously their expectations and commitment to their community.

Institutional agents also provided continuity for the fraternal community. As the keeper of institutional memory for the fraternal community, the fraternal community advisor, along with alumni and other volunteers, provided continuity in progress, and an ability to remember mistakes and achievements. This continuity, along with a supportive chapter environment, the active involvement of members of the fraternal and university community, and a clear and consistent purpose, are conditions required for a "quality chapter experience" (Kuh, 1982, p.19). Since all of these conditions are met at both Purdue and the University of Miami's fraternal community, we may be able to extrapolate that similar conditions are required for other quality, or high performing, fraternal communities.

Another factor that seemed to contribute to the effectiveness of the fraternal community was the existence of attractive alternatives to fraternal life for the university students. Both institutions provided "ample opportunity for student involvement in educationally purposeful out of class activities" (Kuh, 1996, p. 136). Both had strong fraternal communities, but also well-developed residence hall systems, strong student organizations and activities, and in the case of Purdue University, a well-established cooperative living system. "Fraternal communities and sororities are less likely to be divisive forces when strong residence life programs and other vibrant sub-communities are present" (Kuh & Lyons, 1990, p.25). Furthermore, fraternal communities seem to work best (or at least are more compatible with an institution's mission) when undergraduates have other viable options for affiliating with a sub-community of choice, one compatible with their interests, attitudes, and perhaps cultural backgrounds (Lyons & Kuh, 1990, p. 25).

In many ways, these two fraternal communities mimic some characteristics of other high performing systems. Collins and Porras (1997) found that reinforcing core values contributes to organizational success, indeed, that visionary companies "preserve the core." Peters and Waterman (1982) found a similar adherence to core values, and a values-driven operation, in the successful companies that they studied. Moreover, some systems theorists describe successful social systems as ones that "develop self-adjusting behaviors, which stabilize relationships... and perpetuate the system's goals" (Cohen, et al, 1995, p. 57), much like the fraternal community at Purdue and the University of Miami.

A second component of other high performing organizations and systems is their adaptability to the environment:

Any system will make adjustments in policies, rules, regulations, and other operating behavior in order to attempt to survive and maintain itself in relation to its environment . . . (Cohen, et al, 1995, p.63). Every system works toward an internal state of equilibrium by maintaining its existing balance of forces (the status quo); at the same time, every system struggles to respond to the pressures for change, as the surrounding environment demands it. (p.65)

High performing organizations and systems are able to balance orderliness and change. Collins and Porras (1997) found that visionary companies were able to do this by preserving their core value as the unchanging status quo, and at the same time stimulating progress through adaptation to environmental changes or new ideas—much like the fraternal community at Purdue and Miami has done. It should be noted, however, that these Fraternity and sorority systems were often reacting to external pressures from the host institution, the media, and the community.

### Caveats

Two caveats apply to these conclusions. First, we can't be certain whether the characteristics common to these two fraternal communities cause or contribute to their effectiveness, or whether they are simply descriptive features.

Second, even though we label both fraternal communities as high performing, neither was completely free of the issues and concerns traditionally associated with fraternities and sororities. Both experienced occasional alcohol violations, hazing activities, and sexist behaviors. What set these fraternal communities apart in large measure is how they responded to these situations, how they adapted to their campus and local community environment, and how they continually provided opportunities for positive educational experience that enhanced their performance.

### IMPLICATIONS

It would be instructive to expand our knowledge of high performing fraternal communities to more than two institutions. One approach would be to compare the findings highlighted in this chapter and reported in full in Jelke (2001) with results from other high performing fraternal communities identified by Zacker (2001).

It would also be useful to compare fraternal communities perceived to be high performing with those perceived to be low performing. Such work could incorporate additional sources of information, both quantitative and qualitative, such as a detailed GPA analysis of member the assessment of moral development of students in high performing fraternal communities, or the assessment of engagement levels from students of high performing fraternal community.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on our understanding of high performing fraternal communities we offer the following suggestions for improving the quality of the fraternal experience and the effectiveness of Fraternity and sorority organizations.

**First, give culture its due** (Kuh, 1996; Kuh, Schuh, Whitt, et al., 1991; Kuh & Whitt, 1988; Magolda, 1999). One of the main factors that has allowed the institutional agents at Purdue University and the University of Miami to play a role in the effectiveness of these fraternal communities is the understanding of the traditions, icons, history, values, and underlying beliefs of the members. This understanding takes time and a great deal of effort, and may not completely be achieved by non-members, but it seems clear that the better the complex culture of these fraternal communities were understood, the more prepared the institutional agents were to attempt to affect change. A cultural audit of the institution (Kuh, Schuh, Whitt, et al., 1991) focusing on the fraternal community may be one way of better understanding this subculture on different campuses.

**Second, discover how the surrounding environment affects the fraternal community.** Campus cultures and the fraternal organizations that are ensconced within them do not exist in a vacuum. In this study, the environmental characteristics were those that were most distinctive to each institution, the least generalizable, and therefore, the least transferable. Institutional settings, institutional types, scale, social surroundings, and even weather affected the operations of these fraternal communities.

**Third, focus on improving new member recruitment and socialization.** A fraternal community can be no better than the individuals that make it up. Spending more time to insure that the right kind of students join fraternal organizations would increase the chances that new members will have a better understanding of the values and ideals of their organization and the community as a whole. Even at the fraternal communities studied, participants recognized the need for a change in recruitment practices if the move to values-based recruitment was to fully be realized.

The change needs to focus on the way recruitment is conducted, not merely the timing of the recruitment period. A comprehensive and organized change would need to be used for fraternal communities and institutions that conduct formal recruitment for their fraternity or sorority members, as the limited timeframe and current structure often impede the very thing they are trying to achieve—values based recruitment. Realistically, this would need to be started at the chapter level, as students coming in may not be accustomed or prepared for this kind of approach, but would need change coming from all levels

(especially the national and international organizations and the umbrella organizations) since it would need to be uniformly applied.

**Fourth, take every opportunity to reinforce the fraternal ideals.** The values, goals, and priorities of the fraternal community must be consistently and repeatedly communicated and clarified. Both of these systems played a role in maintaining an emphasis on values or balance throughout the recruitment process, the new member education period, other leadership development programs, celebrations, and through formal and informal accountability processes. It is important to reinforce those ideals during these critical times to potential, new and current members.

**Fifth, establish very high expectations for academic performance.** This must be done at both the campus and fraternal community levels. High academic expectations, whether perceived or real, do much to impede frivolous social activities, and create an environment where study time is an expected part of any student's life. Accountability for academic performance also needs to be a part of the system, whether it comes from the university, governing councils or the chapters themselves. Resources that allow fraternal communities to monitor and compare academic standings need to be in place, and that information needs to be readily available to all interested parties including potential members, parents, faculty, national and international organizations, and faculty and staff.

**Sixth, provide multi-tiered leadership programs to regularly educate members and reinforce fraternal values.** These programs should target members at different stages (new members, emerging leaders, officers, executive board members), and should touch on theoretical and practical issues. In addition to educational components, a component focused on utilizing leadership skills and accountability is key. At both Purdue and Miami, the fraternal community was held to a higher standard than other groups in many aspects. The fraternities and sororities were high performing, in part, because they rose to those higher expectations and even adopted them.

**Seventh, challenge and support the fraternal community to improve.** From a practical standpoint, support from administrators and others will help fraternal organizations to accept a strict accountability process. At both institutions studied, it seemed to allow the administration to hold the fraternal community to a higher behavioral standard with less negative feedback for their actions. As noted before, in many instances the behavioral standard was not only accepted as part of the institutional expectations, but was adopted as expectations from members themselves. From a student development standpoint, the nurturing of the fraternal community allows for closer, more significant interaction and relationships with the students who are mem-

bers of these organizations. This, in turn, may allow for more meaningful and impactful interventions with these students. Administration needs to be at a minimum supportive, though highly involved is best.

**Eighth, well-trained, knowledgeable staff must be available to work with the fraternal system.** Miami and Purdue had campus-based advisors with a great deal of experience, training, and education. Students frequently mentioned that the availability of these "experts" were a great help. We realize that this recommendation is counter to the direction many campuses have chosen, that is, distancing the university from the fraternal system. This distancing or arms-length approach is a morally and educationally corrupt position, as we can only expect to reap what we sow.

**Ninth, devote some attention to strengthening other campus-based extracurricular options in addition to the fraternal community.** So doing will increase the motivation for the fraternal community to perform at a higher, more effective level and may help prevent some of the divisiveness that sometimes accompanies the presence of a strong fraternal community. University administrators working with student organizations, student activities, campus programs, student unions, and other student affairs areas need to collaborate in order to ensure that there is a balance of programs, educational opportunities, social activities, and events for students across the board.

**Finally, have a plan for turning a crisis in the fraternal community into an opportunity to improve.** "A socially provided crises at a point when individuals are most teachable can bring about points of self-questioning" (Magolda & Nault, 2001, p. 65). As noted before:

Any system will make adjustments in policies, rules, regulations, and other operating behavior in order to attempt to survive and maintain itself in relation to its environment... (Cohen, et al, 1995, p.63). Every system works toward an internal state of equilibrium by maintaining its existing balance of forces (the status quo); at the same time, every system struggles to respond to the pressures for change as the surrounding environment demands it (Cohen, et. al, 1995, p.65).

A change in university policy or stronger adherence to an existing policy may be enough to cause enough disequilibrium for the members of fraternal organizations to perceive a crisis. This state of disequilibrium should be followed by support from the university so that the fraternal community can adapt toward a new state of equilibrium effectively. A good example of this crisis/support concept is the Maryland Plan at the University of Maryland-College Park (University of Maryland, 2001), which created institutional guidelines for expected behavior and operations of fraternities and sororities. After much sense of disequilibria and support from the university, the Maryland Plan is now just part of the normal operation of the fraternal community

in College Park. The dialogue and interaction between student members and university agents tends to be heightened and meaningful after a crisis. This can often lead to systematic and cultural change. Why wait for a tragedy to create a crisis, when a perceived crisis can be achieved by challenging current practices that are antithetical to espoused values. The only benefits of a crisis (the education, dialogue and interaction that subsequently follow) can be achieved without waiting for a tragic occurrence.

## A FINAL COMMENT

Fraternal organizations have existed on college campuses for more than 225 years. During this time their performance and contributions have been both praised and criticized, depending on the subject and period of time. We hope that the ideas in this chapter and in this book rekindle interest on the part of colleges and universities for establishing a more productive partnership with fraternal community to maximize the potential of these student organizations.

The fraternal communities at the University of Miami and Purdue University are far from utopian. But they do perform at a high enough level to make a positive contribution to the educational experience of most of their members. Frequently the individual organizations making up these communities enact their espoused values. Other campuses could realize similar results by adapting the institutional and community practices described in this chapter.

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## Chapter XV

# Risk Management and Liability Issues For Fraternal Organizations

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### INTRODUCTION

Colleges and universities often undertake the dual roles of educator and regulator in their relationships with fraternal organizations. Although most administrators prefer to emphasize the educational nature of that relationship, parents, community members and the college or university itself often expect these same administrators to regulate the activities of fraternal organizations and the behavior of their members.

Regulation of student behavior is at best difficult, and often impossible. The regulation of fraternal organizations and their members is even more difficult because fraternal organizations are independent entities, often having two faces, that of a local chapter and a inter/national organization. In response to the pressure exerted on them, colleges and universities try a number of methods to influence the members of fraternal organizations.

Most administrators prefer to work with student leaders and alumni using persuasion and incentives. However, colleges and universities often must use more formal methods, such as official recognition or authorization, discipline and eviction from campus housing to respond to the unacceptable activities and irresponsible behavior of fraternal organizations and their members. By exerting this control, administrators worry that they increase the likelihood that their institution will be held liable for the very behaviors they are trying to prevent and discipline. Their worries are sometimes well-founded.

When hazing, alcohol consumption or other dangerous behaviors result in injuries, courts may look not only to fraternal organizations, their members and alumni, but also to the institutions to share lia-