

VALUES & ACTION CONGRUENCE

– Dan Bureau, Kaye Schendel, and Stevan Veldkamp

Practitioners and volunteers invested in the fraternal movement have long challenged fraternity/sorority members to live the values stated in their organizational mission statements. Far too often, undergraduate members espouse their high values but have difficulty living them. Alcohol misuse, hazing, a lack of respect, and a strong disconnect to organizational missions has spurred colleges and universities to take action against the very organizations many believe can provide the most well-rounded, personal and professional developmental experience.

The leadership of the Association of Fraternity Advisors (AFA) believes individuals concerned with the future of the fraternal movement should be engaged in creating solutions to the problems faced by today's sororities and fraternities (Binder & Vojta, 2006). As we seek to understand the experience of students and the potential of fraternal organizations, one essential method is conducting qualitative research. Through qualitative research we can examine the reality of students and gain insight into the areas where invested constituents can be most effective.

Qualitative Research Overview

Maykut & Morehouse (1994) identify eight components of qualitative research to consider.

- An exploratory and descriptive focus
- An emergent design
- A purposive sample
- Data collection in the natural setting
- Emphasis on human as instrument
- Qualitative methods of data collection
- Early and ongoing inductive analysis
- A case study approach to reporting research outcomes

The first three components are related to the design of the study. In the first characteristic, an exploratory and descriptive focus, people's experiences are typically the focus. In emergent design, the evolution of ideas and themes over time has provided the opportunity for gaining additional insight into the experience of subjects, often leading to important findings. A purposive sample provides for the careful selection of participants, increasing the likelihood that common experiences will be represented in the data. According to Trochim (2002), "[w]ith a purposive sample, you are likely to get the opinions of your

target population, but you are also likely to overweight subgroups in your population that are more readily accessible".

The next three components are related to the data collection. The context of understanding what people experience is of particular interest to qualitative researchers. Creating a forum that feels appropriate to the participants is important, and is reflected in the collection of data in the natural setting. The emphasis on human as instrument enhances the ultimate goal of qualitative researchers to create understanding of experiences in order to shape practice. Typical qualitative methods will involve participant observation, group and individual interviews, and the collection of documents. Methods vary and include ethnographies, grounded theory examinations, and phenomenography (Norris, 2003).

The analysis and outcome components include early and ongoing inductive analysis and a case study approach to reporting research outcomes. Documents, individuals, and opinions are sought to help "illuminate the phenomenon of interest" (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994, p. 46) during the process of research development. Rich narratives are the results of qualitative research and provide the reader of the research information for understanding the research outcomes. These eight components can inform future research necessary to understanding students and the potential of fraternal organizations.

Examining Recent Values Initiatives

The authors of *A Call for Values Congruence*, known as the Franklin Square conferees, "believe the cure for the maladies facing collegiate Greek chapters is a collaborative and proactive approach among stakeholders led by college and university presidents" (2003, p. 4). *A Call for Values Congruence* outlines a specific set of strategies for campuses to use which includes administrative and alumni involvement and an assessment process for each campus fraternity/sorority community.

The leadership of AFA and the NASPA Fraternity and Sorority Affairs Knowledge Community coordinated efforts to help bring to life the *Call for Values Congruence* document beginning in 2003. Additional meetings were held in conjunction with the AFA 2003 Annual Meeting and a National Greek Summit was held in Washington, DC in February 2004. Further discussion took

place at the NASPA National Conference in Denver in March 2004. Finally, the Greek Summit VIII hosted presidents representing the three main college and university associations (American Association of State Colleges and Universities, National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities, and National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges) for an update. The presidential delegation announced its desire to create criteria and a process for the certification of fraternity/sorority communities.

The National Association of Latino Fraternal Organizations (NALFO), the National Panhellenic Conference (NPC), the National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC) and the North-American Interfraternity Conference have all unveiled standards documents since the *Call for Values Congruence* was presented. Each of these documents reflects the common standards of member organizations and places responsibility not only on the umbrella association, but on member organizations to enforce the standards.

Evaluating mission performance using the Call for Values Congruence as a template

One researcher sought to investigate the extent to which the *Greek Experience: A Survey of Fraternities and Sororities*, published by the Center for the Study of the College Fraternity, can describe, reflect, and reveal the concepts of the *Call for Values Congruence* document. In addition, the impact of the survey and the *Call for Values Congruence* on a small state university in the Midwest was evaluated.

Information obtained from the document analysis of the *Greek Experience Survey* was shared with five fraternity and sorority professionals. These individuals provided feedback on the survey relative to the *Call for Values Congruence*. The five individuals represented a high-level university administrator, an independent consultant and business owner, a staff member of the North-American Interfraternity Conference, a campus fraternity and sorority advisor, and a fraternity foundation director.

By utilizing the panel of experts, the document analysis of the *Greek Experience Survey*, and the data collected from the campus, questions were identified for the development of further tools to assess the values congruence of fraternity and sorority undergraduate members.

For example, the panelists identified 50 questions from the *Greek Experience Survey* that are applicable to positively affecting intellectual development, which is item one in the *Call for Values Congruence*. In the area of scholarship, the survey asks numerous questions regarding scholarship programming, scholastic support, involvement of faculty advisors, and recognition.

This practice was completed for all action items included in the *Call for Values Congruence*, including values facilitation, alcohol use, leadership development, alumni engagement, faculty involvement, positive relationships (brotherhood and sisterhood), hazing, human dignity, and nurturing citizenship, service and outreach. The results indicate overlap between the *Call for Values Congruence* and the survey, but a retooling of the survey may allow for a more intentional method to evaluate success of fraternal organizations.

Use of Campus Evaluation Practices to Assess Action and Values Congruence

One method to examine action and values congruence is to evaluate performance of chapters in relation to their espoused mission statements. Easily accessible at most fraternity and sorority websites, mission statements provide a glimpse into the purpose of the organization.

At a small private institution in the Midwest, an evaluation project allowed for action and values congruence to be a focal point for a community's goal setting. Eleven organizations are affiliated with the campus. Each organization participated in a meeting with the evaluator to discuss their chapter's performance. The objectives of these hour-long meetings were to examine the following:

1. What does your organization do well and what can you improve?
2. Examining your mission, what things do you think you are doing well and where can you improve?
3. Evaluating other organizations on campus, how well are they implementing their respective missions?

Each organization was broken into small groups. Depending on size, these groups ranged from three to four people in a group to seven or eight people. At least two groups were created at each organization. Reflecting on the organization of the evaluation session, starting with examining what they do well and how they can improve without connecting practices to their mission is important. The concept of mission-based organizations should not be immediately introduced. This allows for the evaluator to remind them they are mission-based organizations, a fact that far too often undergraduates fail to capture in addressing action and values incongruence.

Findings indicated it was an easy task for students to discuss what they do well. Once they were provided their mission as a template to evaluate their performance, the task became more difficult. Ending the meeting with asking them to look at other organization's missions can be powerful because it allows them to catch a glimpse into other groups, recognize commonalities, and provide important feedback to these organizations.

Findings proved interesting. Rarely did organizations identify with their mission statements when they answered what they were doing well. When asked to evaluate their performance in comparison to their missions, many discussed how they were not fulfilling their mission as well as they could. Also, many identified other chapters performing even weaker in facilitating their respective missions. This experience provided insight into how students perceive their own experiences and those of others to reflect their organization's mission.

Non-affiliated students, administrators, and alumni were also asked to participate in a meeting to discuss similar issues. Many cited a lack of understanding of organizational mission when asked about values and actions congruence. External parties could not connect the perceptions of these organizations to reviewed mission statements. Many said if the fraternities and sororities were cognizant of these missions, they may operate better and improve their public image.

Reports were compiled for each organization that included their members' thoughts and the thoughts of others external to the chapter. Individual and organizational identification was withheld to avoid obvious problems that can arise when fraternities and sororities provide feedback about each other. All the information was provided to chapters and student life staff. A full day retreat examining the primary areas needing attention was held to provide education on the necessary skills students must have in order to realize the potential of their organizations.

Recommendations

Two methods to examine mission and action congruence have been provided in this article. As stated, qualitative methods can give voice to the experiences of undergraduates. Some recommendations for future practice include:

- Increased attention by fraternity and sorority professionals to assessing congruence through accreditation programs, reporting systems, and advising and consulting services;
- Reference to standards documents during advising opportunities;
- Inclusion of mission statements in awards programs;

- Partnerships with a wide range of stakeholders to improve campus-specific practices and incorporate headquarters' standards evaluation models;
- Collaboration with external consultants or campus institutional research boards to assess campus climate for mission and action congruence, as well as the success of organizations in fulfilling their missions;
- Finally, the incorporation of qualitative efforts to give voice to quantitative data as well as provide guidance for policy and decision making.

Conclusion

Accountability in higher education and the interfraternal world has never been more important. Challenging persons invested in the fraternal movement to examine how actions may reflect congruence with or disregard for the missions of their organization must be an adopted practice in efforts to reform undergraduate fraternities and sororities. For colleges and universities, the practice of qualitative research to examine current success and prepare recommendations for future practice can reflect institutional missions. Connecting mission and actions to create a more meaningful and developmental fraternal experience can be an essential practice for the long-term preservation of fraternal organizations.

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