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## The Struggles of Research in Fraternity and Sorority Life

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## **THE STRUGGLES OF RESEARCH IN FRATERNITY AND SORORITY LIFE**

**Eric Norman, Ed.D.**

As I enter into the second year of my role as *Oracle* Editor, I have found myself reflecting on the lifecycle for research in fraternity and sorority life. Having been involved in the discussion of *Oracle* since its inception, I understand the need to make informed decisions with credible research and theory. This is obviously not a new thought, as Upcraft noted in 1993,

There is a suspicion, usually felt by the researchers in our field, that our theories are not used enough by practitioners as they develop policy, make decisions, solve problems, deliver services and programs, manage budgets, and in general do their jobs. (p. 260)

Once the journal began, I anticipated the floodgates would be opened as articles would pour in from across a wide variety of disciplines. However, when I accepted the position in the fall of 2006, I was informed that because there were so few submissions of quality, there were not enough articles to publish a journal for the spring of 2007 and concentrate on the solicitation of research for the fall 2007 issue. This caused me to ponder why there was a lack of articles. Over the next few months as Editor, I discovered that the publication timeline for a peer-reviewed journal (from submission to publication) takes considerably longer than I expected. This editorial will help demystify the process and better explain how an article submission is transformed into a published journal article along with a better comprehension of the anticipated timeline.

*Oracle* receives submissions from a number of sources. We receive articles from faculty, students (both at the master's and doctorate level), and practitioners from every level in student affairs, including entry level professionals and vice presidents. The topics submitted vary, however many articles tend to study similar themes, including recruitment, alcohol use and abuse, hazing, leadership, image and marketing, assessment, deviance, multicultural chapters, governance, and identity development.

The *Oracle* Peer Review Board proactively seeks out research to create a robust, diverse, and high quality collection from which to draw. For example, Peer Review Board members contact graduate programs and institutions with fraternity/sorority communities. We also seek out presenters at various conferences whose programs involve fraternity/sorority life (either as a subject matter or as a sample population). This has included the fields of higher education, psychology, anthropology, nutrition, sociology, criminal justice, management, women's studies, African American studies, Latina/o studies, and history. We have highly encouraged research in areas where there appears to be a need to confirm anecdotal evidence, where findings and recommendations conflict, where the existing research has become antiquated, or where there is a need for a broad-based multi-campus evaluation. These preferred topics would include leadership development, hazing interventions, honor codes and their effectiveness, self governance models, optimum chapter sizes, National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) data with regard to fraternal affiliation, alcohol programs, deferred recruitment, character development, retention, and engagement (as identified through *Oracle* planning meetings). We have also worked with other journals for submission referrals that may not parallel their mission,

but would benefit *Oracle*'s readership. Lastly, we partner with the Center for the Study of the College Fraternity (CSCF) to help identify areas of needed research in the field.

When recruiting articles, we hear about a number of issues that impede submissions. For example, we fight the misperception that submissions are limited to faculty or those with a doctorate. In fact, this journal is an outstanding opportunity for master's students to utilize their thesis to become published. We have received high quality papers written for graduate courses that are currently being prepared for future issues.

Some researchers struggle to gain permission from the chapter, inter/national organization, or governing council in order to conduct their studies. If you are experiencing such barriers, feel free to contact us so we can assist you in writing a proposal to gain approval. In some cases, the individuals conducting research are also looking for post-masters or post-doctorate employment and have little time to shape an article out of their research. This is unfortunate, as the research is generally conducted under the tutelage of an experienced faculty or administrator. *Oracle* Peer Review Board members may be able to assist researchers in finding a co-author who can help develop an article based on the researchers' findings. Lastly, we hear from potential authors that their writing abilities may not be as strong as they feel necessary to construct a good article. The editors are dedicated to aid in the development of any article that is grounded in research and theory. Writing is a process, and should be viewed as an ability to learn and to accept constructive criticism to improve your abilities as a writer and researcher.

Once *Oracle* receives a submission, the reviewing and editing process begins. First, the article is reviewed by either the editor or associate editor. In many cases, the lead researcher is asked to clarify areas and/or make modifications. If the article is well structured, has a grounded methodology, and is well written, it is forwarded on to the Peer Review Board for comments and editing. Here, the Review Board makes a determination as to whether the article is a good fit for *Oracle*. In some cases, the article may be better placed in *Perspectives*, and will be referred to that editor. In other cases, the article may need some additional content work and would be returned to the researcher for corrections. Or, the article may not be organized as a research article, in which case it may be rejected with suggestions for rewriting.

There are a few areas where the vast majority of articles tend to need assistance. First, methodology and sampling are frequently not explained to the degree necessary, or the methods used are inadequate. We are fortunate to have a number of professionals who can work with the author to help refine these areas. Nomenclature is another area typically in need of correction. For example, it is critical to move away from the term "Greek" and instead use fraternity/sorority both to differentiate fraternal organizations from the country of Greece and to be inclusive of fraternal organizations that are not named with Greek letters. It is of great aid to consult the most recent edition of the American Psychological Association (APA) publication manual when writing so that citations are done correctly, but also to aid in structuring a document that is grammatically correct and clear in organization. Frequently, a term needs to be operationally defined for clarity. Lastly, additional citations may be requested to bolster arguments and points.

If the Peer Review Board feels the article is research-based and is written well, typically the article will be accepted with revisions. These revisions may be global in comment or may request

specific areas be retooled and rewritten. The process to go from submission to review can take, on average, two months. The article is then sent to the lead researcher for revisions. From my experience, it takes the author(s) at least one month to make the necessary changes and to clarify and points that are in need of clarification by the Peer Review Board. In many cases, it can take up to three months for the areas to be re-addressed. The article is then resubmitted to the Editor to check the revisions. If the requested changes have been accomplished, the work is sent to back to the Peer Review Board for final refining.

The Peer Review Board will make further edits during this stage. These typically involve building transitions, moving sections, eliminating redundancy, and improving wording. This is then given to the Editor to compile and then typically returned to the researcher for final clarification. This process can take two months or more depending upon the quantity of changes requested by the Peer Review Board. From there, the article is given a final edit and formatting occurs.

The process from when the researcher first submits the article through to the point where it is ready for publication usually takes about six months. The Editor and Associate Editor then decide the order and compilation of articles for an issue. With a robust pool of articles, the typical lead time can be over one year.

With the process detailed and demystified, we are very pleased to have a fine compilation of articles to resume the publication of *Oracle*. In this issue, we have an article on leadership by Dr. Danny Kelly, focusing on the leadership experience of being a fraternity president and its impact on one's career. We have an article from Dr. Andrew F. Wall, Dr. Logan Hazen, Dr. Mickey Trockel, and Ms. Becky Markwell, examining a pilot program for sororities to address substance use prevention efforts. To broaden our topic base, we have a submission by Dr. Michelle Nicropolis, who examines the knowledge of eating disorders of fraternity/sorority life professionals, as compared to other student affairs professionals. Michael D'Archangelo and Jessica Berner used a cost benefit model to analyze the effectiveness of assessment and evaluations in fraternity/sorority life. Lastly, Dr. Stephen S. Owen, Dr. Tod W. Burke, and David Vichesky examine hazing behaviors, attitude, and solutions between hazers and non hazers. With this variety of topics and researcher backgrounds, there is a deep pool of information that can be used to guide decision-making and practice. We hope you enjoy the articles presented in this issue and that you consider submitting a research article yourself in the near future.

### Reference

Upcraft, M. L. (1993). Translating Theory into Practice. In M. J. Barr & Assoc. (Eds.), *The Handbook of Student Affairs Administration* (pp. 260-273). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

*Dr. Eric Norman serves as the Oracle Editor. He is the Associate Dean of Students and Director of Judicial Affairs at Louisiana State University. Previously, Dr. Norman was the Director of Fraternity and Sorority Life at Virginia Tech, as well as the Assistant Director of Fraternities, Sororities, Registered Student Organizations, and Leadership at the University of Delaware. He received his Ed.D. in Education Leadership in Administration and Policy from the University of Delaware; his Master of Education in Student Affairs Practice in Higher Education from the University of Delaware; his Master of Arts in Psychology from Washington College; and his Bachelor of Art and Science from the University of Delaware.*