

5-19-2022

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Recommended Citation

Ballinger, Gary and Workman, Jamie L. (2022) "Fraternity/Sorority Organizational Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic," *Oracle: The Research Journal of the Association of Fraternity/Sorority Advisors*: Vol. 17: Iss. 1, Article 1.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.25774/z3fx-8812>

Available at: <https://scholarworks.wm.edu/oracle/vol17/iss1/1>

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Ballinger and Workman: Fraternity/Sorority Organizational Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic
FRATERNITY/SORORITY ORGANIZATIONAL RESPONSE TO THE COVID-19
PANDEMIC

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This article focuses on adaptations organizations made as a result of COVID-19. The purpose was to determine what changes have been made, and how staff/volunteers believe those changes impacted the organization. Oliver's (1977; 1980) expectation confirmation theory served as the theoretical framework. The researchers collected data via survey. Organizations experienced budget cuts, modified programming, and postponed chapter expansion, among others. Participants experienced an increase in virtual meetings and discussed the effectiveness of technology. Eighty-nine percent believe their relationships with undergraduate chapters remained consistent or grew stronger during the pandemic. The article concludes with strategies for campus-based professionals and organizations as they navigate changes that may be permanent in the post-pandemic world.

Keywords: Fraternities and sororities, COVID-19, budgets, technology use

Introduction

Student involvement is an essential part of the collegiate experience and many students chose to be engaged in a fraternity or sorority (Asel et al., 2015; Astin, 1999). Fraternities and sororities provide opportunities for socialization, connection, personal growth (Biddix, 2014; Routon & Walker, 2016; Pike, 2003), and can play an essential role in retention efforts (Biddix, 2014; DeBard & Sacks, 2011; Routon & Walker, 2016). Numerous scholars have highlighted criticism and critiques on the relevancy and impact of membership including hazing (Nirh, 2020; Nuwer, 2015; Richardson et al., 2019), health and wellness (McCready, 2019; Sasso & Schwitzer, 2016), academic performance (Mara, 2018; Yates, 2020), moral development (Dowiak, 2016; Mathiasen, 2005), and diversity and inclusion efforts (Cabrera, 2018; Garcia & Duran, 2020; Parker & Pascarella, 2018). Criticisms have also been driven by student protests on campuses and calls to abolish

fraternity and sorority life (Brown, 2021). Students have highlighted challenges that organizations have had addressing sexual assault, diversity, and unhealthy alcohol consumption (Hidalgo Bellows, 2021). In an effort to counter critiques, the fraternity and sorority movement has attempted to address challenges, develop as leadership organizations, re-center and reinforce values, purpose and relevance. While the fraternal movement has faced these challenges, it has never faced a crisis that impacted organizational structure and operational functions similar to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The challenges that presented during the pandemic left many seasoned leaders and organizations seeking guidance and clarity regarding issues that were previously unexplored. To meet the demand a number of committees and workgroups were formed by umbrella organizations including the North American Interfraternity Conference (NIC) COVID-19 Think Tank, National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC) COVID-19 Task Force, and National Panhellenic Con-

ference (NPC) Recruitment Contingencies Task Force. Additionally, the National Association of Latino Fraternal Organizations (NALFO), National Multicultural Greek Council (NMGCC), and National APIDA Panhellenic Association (NAPA) adjusted governing policies, meetings, and conferences to support their membership. The pandemic revealed new threats to essential services and operations routinely managed by volunteers and staff. Many organizations have historically relied on face to face engagement with consulting staff and volunteers, leadership programming, convention attendance, social events, community service, education, and recruitment as integral to their operational success. The onset of COVID-19 required substantial and immediate changes to operations at both the campus and organizational levels. Given this, the researchers wanted to specifically explore how the pandemic impacted service delivery and organizational structure of inter/national fraternities and sororities.

Organization and Governance of Fraternities and Sororities

Fraternities and sororities have played a vital role on college campuses since the eighteenth century. Early on, organizations were governed loosely, oftentimes by the “alpha” or “mother chapter” with the initial founding chapter retaining most control over other entities and experiences. As chapters expanded to other universities, more complex structures evolved with power being delegated to an organization’s convention, then to national boards, and finally to a paid professional staff. As the breadth of these organizations expanded, it was imperative to create an elaborate network of volunteers and professionals to support the undergraduate to alumni experience (Baird, 1905/1963).

The central office or “headquarters” evolved from a volunteer driven organization to a more complex business model that needed to oversee the day to day management of undergraduate chapters, program-

ming, support alumni, foundation and fundraising activities, and philanthropic and community engagement (Workman & Ballinger, 2020). While structural models vary between fraternal organizations from a paid professional team, volunteer-driven support, or a hybrid model, every organization has had to adjust due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Relevant Research

A growing body of scholarship regarding student engagement and holistic well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic is emerging. As part of a larger longitudinal study of the fraternity experience, McCreary et al. (2021) found three negative trends they attribute to the COVID-19 pandemic. When compared to data collected in the falls of 2018 and 2019, fall 2020 data revealed that fraternity members had increased alcohol use, a higher concentration of “always joiners” (p. 3) or those who plan on joining a fraternal organization, and a spike in social dominance hazing motivation. The authors conclude with implications for fraternity and sorority professionals and the higher education community that will be useful in the current climate, and once COVID-19 subsides.

The NPC and the University of Tennessee Knoxville Postsecondary Education Research Center conducted a survey on sorority member experiences during the 2020-2021 academic year. At the time of survey, sorority members indicated high levels of sorority support, school support, mental health and wellbeing, satisfaction and engagement, in each measured area. Exceptions to this were members who had financial concerns, negative feelings towards the pandemic, and those who experienced bullying or other negative interactions with their sisters (NPC & University of Tennessee Knoxville Postsecondary Education Researcher Center, 2021).

The Healthy Minds Network and the American College Health Association (2020) were among the first to publish data

related to this topic. Between March 2020 and May 2020, they collected survey data from 18,764 students on 14 college campuses. Students were questioned on a variety of topics, including their perceived likelihood of themselves or a loved one becoming infected with virus, mental health and well-being, academic adjustments, financial security and long-term impacts. While results varied by topic, it is notable that college and university administrators, faculty, and campus mental health and medical services staff were identified as positive support systems for students (2020).

Given that, it is important to explore how COVID-19 has impacted college student engagement and students' ability to connect with student affairs and other higher education professionals. Peck et al. (2020) published an essay on the value of campus activities professionals and lessons learned from the pandemic. As institutions of higher education transitioned to remote learning in the spring 2020 semester, and in some cases the 2020-2021 academic school year, and faced budget cuts, many leaders started to question the purpose of campus activities and the professionals who support those activities. Pulling from past literature on student engagement in times of crisis (McCullar, 2011; Zdziarski, et al., 2007) the authors assert that campus activities professionals "represent some of the most valuable personnel in times of crisis" (Peck et al., 2020, p. 6). Peck et al. note campus activities professionals have direct access to a valuable resource on a college campus: engaged students. The authors suggest that joint efforts between campus activities professionals and their student leaders can help create a campus community, where, even if remote or physically distanced, students feel connected to and can thrive.

Additional research has explored the sense of connection Peck et al. (2020) reference. Ning et al. (2021) conducted a comparative study of sense of belonging and mattering during the first-year welcome experience for the years 2019 and 2020.

Results from incoming first-year and transfer students in 2019 (N=2,000) and 2020 (N=1,400) indicate a significant decline in students' sense of belonging, mattering, and overall connection to their campus between the two years. Participants specified that opportunities to meet people, a positive move-in experience for on-campus students, and a positive welcome experience were critical in their development of sense of belonging, mattering, and connection. Modifications made to these opportunities due to the pandemic resulted in the decline for 2020. While the authors acknowledge the necessity of changes in 2020, they believed those experiences could have been improved with better, and not exclusively email, communication between university personnel and students, as well as improved upon technology for virtual events. Not surprisingly, the authors stress the importance of face to face experiences students were able to have in 2020, and encourage campus professionals to provide "comparable, inclusive, and equitable" (p. 15) experiences for students, regardless of modality.

Mucci-Ferris et al. (2021) also researched student experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic. They make the powerful statement, "The COVID-19 crisis should receive greater attention than any other transition; institutional leaders should make efforts to understand and accommodate the different aspects of this transformed college experience" (p. 205). In their qualitative study of 17 undergraduates, the researchers found that students needed online learning that was both creative and intentional, counseling and other mental health resources to support wellness in the new environment, and assistance in transition. While they note existing literature on college student transition is not specific to the pandemic, tools and strategies found in the literature can be applied. The authors conclude with a recommendation for campuses to focus on the positive aspects of the student experience during the cultural shift caused by COVID-19 (2021).

Arguably, these shifts will continue even after the pandemic subsides. The college or university experience can be thought of as an evolving being, one that is constant and ever-changing. Using lessons learned from the pandemic, such as those identified by the scholars above, will help higher education and student affairs professionals serve our students better moving forward in a post-COVID-19 society.

Theoretical Framework: Expectation Confirmation Theory

Overview

Expectation confirmation theory (ECT), first developed by Richard Oliver (1977, 1980) is a foundational model in consumer research. ECT explores the relationship between consumer expectations and performance of a product, service, or technology (PST), and how each connects to overall product satisfaction. Oliver's (1977, 1980) model of performance includes consumer expectations and perceived performance of a PST, confirmation or disconfirmation of beliefs, and overall satisfaction. When a PST meets the consumer's expectations, there is satisfaction and a confirmation of beliefs. When a PST exceeds those expectations, a disconfirmation of beliefs and satisfaction occurs. If a PST performs below the consumer's expectations, there is both a disconfirmation of beliefs and dissatisfaction.

Further, ECT can help determine the likelihood of a consumer to purchase a product or use a service or technology in the future. Jiang and Klein (2009) explain that prior to any event, a consumer has expectations. Expectations serve as the "comparison anchor" (p. 385) in the ECT model. They are what consumers base their evaluation of a PST on and use to develop their confirmation or disconfirmation judgements. Jiang and Klein (2009) note performance of a PST is ultimately connected to the consumers' original expectations of the PST, and will in turn influence whether or not the PST is

purchased or used again. If a PST meets or exceeds consumers' expectations, confirmation occurs and the consumer is likely to purchase or use that PST in the future; if a PST does not meet the original expectations, a consumer is not likely to purchase or use it in the future.

ECT in Higher Education and Student Affairs Research

In today's consumer-based society, one cannot ignore the fact that higher education is a business, and students are our customers. With that, ECT has emerged as a useful tool in determining the effectiveness of campus programs and services. Keengwe et al. (2012) researched college student and instructor satisfaction with e-learning tools in an online learning environment. Using ECT as their lens, the researchers determined that student expectations were key factors instructors considered as they designed and provided efficient and effective technology tools to enhance student learning.

Walleser (2014) used tenets of ECT in her dissertation research on student academic advising at a technical college. Walleser received survey responses from 2,365 students pursuing an associate's degree. Participants were asked to evaluate 12 elements of the college's academic advising model, as well as their overall satisfaction with the advising experience. Fifty-two percent of her respondents were either highly satisfied or satisfied. The majority of satisfied students had a confirmation of beliefs, as they received the type of experience they expected. Conversely, 48% were either dissatisfied or highly dissatisfied. These students expected more from their academic advising and experienced a disconfirmation of beliefs. With nearly even percentages on each side of the scale, Walleser developed strategies to help improve the advising experience. Those include group advising opportunities, longer, more detailed advising appointments which could allow for more specific conversations around academic courses, and increased budget to allow for

more advisors on staff at the researched college (2014).

Grabsch et al., (2021) recently researched students on the autism spectrum and their expectation of and satisfaction with their residence hall environment. Using ECT as their framework, the team determined most participants were satisfied with their overall on-campus housing experience and felt that it met their expectations. Exceptions were students who had difficulty with their roommates, noise issues, or were dissatisfied with the physical space of their residence hall. Implications from this research were designed specifically for housing and residence life professionals but could be applied to other areas of higher education and student affairs. Those include peer mentoring and academic support programs for students with autism, technology accommodations that meet student needs, and more training for staff on relating to and supporting the population (2021).

ECT in COVID-19 Research

As noted above, ECT focuses on customer expectations of a product, service, or technology. With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the use of technology became a primary tool many industries used to aid in product or service delivery. Higher education saw major shifts toward technology use as the primary method for instruction, communication, and in many cases student engagement. Recent researchers have used ECT as a tool for assessing student expectations and satisfaction levels during remote learning due to COVID-19. Wang et al. (2021) surveyed college student satisfaction with online learning tools at a university where remote-only learning was conducted during the pandemic. Results indicated high levels of student satisfaction, to the point where the authors recommended the continued promotion of online learning modalities post-pandemic. Alzahrani and Seth (2021) conducted similar research on student expectations of and satisfaction with a LMS during remote learning due to

COVID-19. Alzahrani and Seth determined that service quality, in this case the LMS itself, did not impact student satisfaction, but content quality and student self-efficacy had large impacts. Alzahrani and Seth suggested effective LMS usage relates less to the LMS as a tool, and more to the content of the course, and students' confidence levels with that content.

Methods

The researchers used a purposive and selective sampling technique (Creswell, 2013) for this study. Participants were recruited from multiple professional social media platforms and listservs. Fraternities and sororities represented by the NALFO, NAPA, NIC, NMGC, NPC, NPHC and those unaffiliated with a national umbrella organization were included in the request. Additional follow up requests were conducted with 69 fraternities and sororities randomly selected from a large public institution's active fraternity and sorority community. Data were collected via survey distribution. The survey provided respondents an opportunity to comment on national office structure both prior to the pandemic and current structure, financial considerations, changes made to operations and services, and technology use. Participants also had the opportunity to note other changes their organizations have had to make to campus programs and services due to the pandemic, and reflect on their overall satisfaction level with those changes in regards to meeting student needs.

Respondent Demographics

Twenty-six organizations are represented in the results and ranged across different organizational umbrella membership types with the largest participation from NIC member organizations (35%), followed by NPC (23%), unaffiliated (23%), NALFO (8%), NAPA (8%), NPHC (3%), there were no participants from the National Multicultural Greek Council. Staffing structure differed in the organizational context with ap-

proximately 56% of respondents consisting of organizations with a paid professional staff, 39% with a blended volunteer and professional staff structure, and 4% with a fully volunteer driven organization. The roles and positions of respondents varied and included executive director/chief executive officer (42%), director of chapter services/support/wellness (23%), assistant/associate director for chapter services (15%), coordinator (12%), and volunteer (8%).

Data Analysis

Data analysis occurred upon the survey's closure. The researchers first examined multiple choice questions where respondents indicated: (1) national office structure, (2) whether or not the organization experienced budget cuts, (3) steps taken during the pandemic due to budget cuts or safety precautions, (4) technology use, and (5) relationships. Review of these data provided the researchers preliminary themes of *economic, human and staff resources, technology, and customer service*. The second step in data analysis occurred as the researchers reviewed the participant responses to open-ended survey questions. Using Saldaña's (2016) coding for patterns technique, the researchers determined patterns which were categorized into the four themes. To best ensure credibility and transferability of the coding process, one member of the research team is a faculty member who teaches research methods in education and is less connected to the fraternity and sorority community than the primary researcher. As the secondary researcher, she was able to review the coding completed by the primary researcher and determine if Saldaña's (2016) techniques were followed, and if the coding process and themes could be corroborated by an external reviewer.

Results and Discussion

Respondents indicated several operational changes as a way to address the unique challenges presented by the pandemic. Upon completion of coding and verifica-

tion by the secondary researcher, several themes emerged in the data that impacted or resulted in operational changes. Organizationally these results revealed adjustments in the following areas including economic impact, human and staff resources, technology usage, and customer service.

Economic Impact

All industries were economically impacted by the pandemic, higher education and fraternity and sorority organizations were no exception. Sixty-four percent of respondents indicated that the crisis resulted in budget reductions for their respective organization. The reductions culminated in elimination of face to face programming such as conventions, leadership conferences, workshops, and meetings for 26% of respondents.

Travel to undergraduate chapters which is oftentimes a primary support and coaching tool was eliminated by 23% of organizations. One participant noted,

We visited very few campuses last year.

It was only on an as needed basis, if the institution allowed it, and our staff member felt comfortable traveling. We plan to resume travel this upcoming year. Most of our services have stayed consistent with organizational goals prior to the pandemic, but we will have more of an emphasis on recruitment support during the upcoming year.

Others responded, "We shifted to virtual chapter support, incorporating monthly touchpoints virtually with almost all chapters. Officer roundtables done virtually were also added" and "We have shifted from every chapter getting an annual in-person visitation to a bi-weekly [virtual] coaching mode."

The reductions or eliminations of travel can impact customer service expectations. While it is likely that chapters understood the necessity of remote meetings rather than campus visits, they may or may not believe remote support or technology used for that support fully met their needs. Participants

indicated, “Instead of traveling for entity visits we are going to utilize Zoom to conduct them going forward and decrease the travel budget” and “We have seen deeper relationships develop between staff and our undergraduates as we shifted to Zoom meetings” Oliver (1977; 1980) and Jiang and Klein (2009) noted that if a PST met a consumer’s expectations, satisfaction would occur. If the PST did not meet expectations, a disconfirmation of beliefs and dissatisfaction would occur. While not every respondent commented on how they perceived reduced or eliminated travel impacted customer service, the quotes above indicate that satisfaction was achieved in some cases.

A factor that may continue to impact the financial health in the short term is the decision to eliminate or postpone growth and expansion efforts for undergraduate chapters. Nearly 16% of expansion efforts were eliminated in an additional method to reduce budgets and remain financially solvent. While this was a prudent decision, the impact on future budgets in terms of income from membership dues and fees may reverberate beyond the duration of the pandemic. In fact, two organizations indicated “We basically went one-year with...no recruitment/intake so the impact on the ‘bottomline’ was significant” additionally one participant expressed concerns that they may “struggle with future sustainability with lower numbers.”

Human capital and staffing resources were another method of budget reduction that 14% of groups instituted including elimination of positions, furloughs, or hiring freezes. Some organizations were able to bypass this scenario by taking advantage of governmental loans through the Payroll Protection Program (PPP). Others tapped into reserves and other financial resources, reduced or completely eliminated physical office space, and temporarily halted production of the entity’s magazine or other printed publications.

Human and Staff Resources

While the majority of participants (58%) indicated that their organization was driven by a paid professional staffing model, modifications were made that impacted human and staff resources by virtually all organizations regardless of staffing or volunteer structure. These modifications were not all viewed as negative and revealed some opportunities for organizations to think innovatively about human resource management.

One organization had already instituted a plan to broaden their staff that progressed despite the pandemic which allowed them to continue “restructuring [that] included the hiring of more experienced professionals to deliver chapter support in strategic ways that include both in-person and virtual touchpoints for both chapter members/alumni leaders.” Additionally, a participant expressed a belief that their organization was now “more adaptable in general and reinforced the need for restructuring” this resulted in leaders becoming “more comfortable with some of the fluidity of structure AND remote work.”

Remote work environments were a theme that continued throughout responses that were viewed as a positive outcome. Individuals were no longer tied to physical structures or to a headquarters building which allowed for more flexibility and balance. The flexibility of remote work made it “easier to make small connections with folks since everyone is comfortable with video chats.” This innovative approach continued and allowed groups to look at how “new positions and roles have been developed and some positions have changed to meet the needs of the organization.” Applying to ECT (Oliver, 1977; 1980), one can think of organization employees and volunteers as, in a way, customers of their organization’s product. Descriptors like “flexibility” and “innovative approach” indicate satisfaction. Most likely, some also experienced a disconfirmation of beliefs, as participants indicated their organizations were “more adaptable” and “more

comfortable” than they were prior to the pandemic. It seems that for some, changes made necessary by COVID-19 have improved employee or volunteer expectations and services for the better.

Technology

Expanded utilization of technology allowed organizations to pivot and extend educational opportunities and training. Sixty-four percent believed that their current use of technology was meeting the needs for their organization. Various communication and technological tools were utilized with the most widely used platform being Zoom (92%) followed by Microsoft Teams/Office 365 platforms (58%); Google platforms (20%); and Slack (15%). Additional technology platforms included Uberconference, Monday.com, Salesforce, and Socio.

Much of the technology used was already a part of regular operations for organizations but expanded because of travel restrictions as a way to ensure continuity of service and communication. This communication pivot shifted from “utilizing phone calls a majority of the time to utilizing Zoom more, especially with undergraduates.” While many felt that technology was not a replacement for face to face engagement it did allow for a more personal touch and opportunity to build relationships:

We have seen deeper relationships develop between staff and our undergraduates as we shifted to Zoom meetings. The use of virtual educational programming has also allowed us to reach more undergraduates who may have not been able to attend in-person programming due to time commitment or finances.

The shift to virtual platforms resulted in expansion and increased attendance for many regular programs. Organizations reported that they witnessed increased attendance and were able to open programming opportunities to more students since financial, travel, and facility restrictions were no longer barriers for undergraduate students

and alumni alike. More individuals were able to “engage in curriculum,” “attend virtual convention,” and some indicated that “We were able to have many more participants and engagement. Although we will resume in-person national events, we will be utilizing either whova or another virtual platform to stream it live and encourage people to still attend.” While results may not permanently alter the traditional immersive face to face experience the success seemed to indicate that some shifts utilizing technology may continue to allow for additional engagement.

While many respondents indicated a number of different successes, not all organizations felt as if the technological replacements were sufficient. Some cited dissatisfaction with virtual programs and felt as if there were “more participation via remote attendance to various meetings, but the quality of meetings decreased.” Additionally, one organization that had received negative feedback from their constituents reported that individuals believed that the use of technology for programming and meeting needs was “Terrible” and that “Everyone hated virtual gatherings.”

These findings connect both to Oliver’s (1977; 1980) ECT, Jiang and Klein’s (2009) discussion of expectations within the model and multiple studies that incorporated the theory as a framework. As technology is one of three areas ECT evaluates, one must consider if the expanded use of technology in everyday work and engaging with chapters is meeting customer needs. In this case, perceptions are mixed. Several respondents indicated that the use of technology enabled them to build stronger relationships with students and have a larger number of participants at virtual conferences and meetings. For them, customer satisfaction occurred. Disconfirmation of beliefs most likely occurred in some cases, particularly for those who were surprised by those levels of attendance and engagement. Other participants were not satisfied. Those who described virtual programming as “Terrible” or noted

that participants “hated” those opportunities not only experienced dissatisfaction but also a confirmation of beliefs. Phrasing like “Everyone hated virtual gatherings” is most likely not true. Someone who assumes that most likely believes that face to face programming and meetings are the best, and possibly the only, way to meet customer expectations and student needs.

Considering technology use in other studies of higher education using the ECT (Oliver 1977; 1980) model, the technology itself is not necessarily what causes student satisfaction or dissatisfaction. Keengwe et al. (2012), Cheng and Yeung (2018), Wang et al. (2021), and Alzahrani and Seth (2021) all conducted research on student satisfaction with LMS, some prior to, and some during the pandemic. In each case, students indicated that the content of the courses impacted their satisfaction and learning more so than the platform used. Participants in our study who believed that “Everyone hated virtual gatherings”, for example, may need to consider the content that delivered over the fact that the gathering was held virtually.

Customer Service

To those outside of the fraternal community it may seem odd to view an organization’s members as customers; however, national organizations have grown accustomed to blending and understanding the business aspects of fraternities and sororities. As consumers, individual members, chapters, alumni, and to some degree campus-based professionals expect to receive a certain level of service and personal connections which were disrupted as a result of the pandemic. The pivot in service delivery did not only occur during the duration of the pandemic but may continue in some form for organizations in the future. One participant indicated that their organization did not experience a reduction in services or support and “in fact we raised our services and created additional programming for our members during this time.” This increase

in services continued while some organizations “shifted from every chapter getting an annual in-person visitation to a bi-weekly coaching mode.”

While there is a consumer type connection between organizations and their members, the center of that connection is built upon relationships. Fifty-six percent of participants believe that their relationships with undergraduate chapters remained consistent and were about the same as they were prior to the pandemic, however 33% indicated that they believed that their relationships were stronger now than before the pandemic. These newly formed relationships allowed organizational staff to have “really hard conversations with members regarding mental health of individual members and the challenges regarding adjusted operations and recruiting. As the Executive Director, I have had more conversations with members, more workshops, and more conversations with host institutions.” That statement was affirmed by others who indicated, “Through the increased communication we have seen chapters develop a better understanding of the purpose of our headquarters and what resources and support we can provide.” Additionally, organizations expressed an overwhelming belief that they:

remained committed to providing support and services to our members during the pandemic, both to undergraduates and alumni. Our chapters and alumni associations/clubs were assigned to specific senior level staff professionals [...] who maintained monthly contact to provide updates, give guidance, and [support] operational functions to these groups. This was done via Zoom and phone calls since in-person travel and campus interactions were prohibited/ not advised.

Organizations believe that many of the changes that were implemented as a result of the pandemic may continue for the near future. This includes continuing and expanding online education opportunities

for members and “more of an emphasis on recruitment support during the upcoming year.” Continuing to build out the resources available to chapters and members will help “provide our chapter with more resources regarding the member experience and we do believe that some practices will translate into the member experience post pandemic.”

Despite a number of positive modifications, some fraternity/sorority professionals acknowledged that while, “our engagement has been more frequent with our chapters than in prior years” they expressed concerns that the “relationships’ strength isn’t as strong.” The need for connections and relationships with students is consistent with other studies of higher education using the ECT model (Oliver, 1977; 1980). While Walleser’s (2014) research on academic advising found slightly more students satisfied with their advising experience than those who were not, implications from this research, including longer, more detailed advising appointments and group advising, indicate a need for student connections with their advisors and peers. Similarly, Grabsch, Melton, and Gilson’s (2021) study of students on the autism spectrum and their expectations and experiences with on-campus housing, noted the need for additional training of residence hall staff. While this training could address multiple topics, the ability to connect with and support the student population was noted.

Implications

Implications for campus-based professionals

As a result of potential budget reductions on national organizations and on college campuses, greater collaboration and partnerships are imperative. While relationships between these two entities may have been strained in the past, there has never existed a greater opportunity for growth and support to meet the needs of the customers both serve-students. National organizations can partner with campus-based profession-

als for leadership colleges, short-term visits, and other programming that occurs on college campuses or is conducted virtually. By partnering with student affairs and other higher education professionals on specific campuses, not only will national organizations save valuable dollars, but they will also strengthen relationships with campus-based professionals. In turn, those professionals will strengthen their own relationships with their chapters as well as further develop in their areas of expertise.

Additionally, reductions in staff that many respondents experienced may have caused roles to be reduced, expanded, or enhanced. Campus-based advisors may have to take the time to develop a new understanding on how roles and responsibilities may have changed for each organization. The traditional headquarters support model may have been upended and need to be reimaged. Campus advisors may want to dedicate considerable time reaching out to the national organizations of their respective chapters in order to gain a better understanding of the impact that may have occurred within organizations.

Student affairs professionals may want to take the time to develop proactive communication tools or reporting structures that can be shared with volunteers and national staff. Providing sustained and regular feedback may aid organizational staff and volunteers the opportunity to think critically and nimbly about the way that they serve chapters on their respective campus. It will be necessary to increase timely communication and feedback so that challenges can be addressed appropriately and successes can be shared when they occur. Advisors cannot wait for a time of crisis to interact with their national partners and need to continue to build strong proactive relationships for the success of all involved.

Finally, campus-based advisors must dedicate the time necessary to gain an understanding of the support that their undergraduate students need. They must leverage that information and their sustained

relationships with students to help fill the gaps that may exist between the national organization, volunteers, and students. They can play an important role as professionals and mentors to help undergraduate chapters succeed and grow.

Implications for National Organization Staff and Volunteers

These data indicate a number of implications for national staff and volunteers. While increased immersive and face to face interactions may return, the utilization of technology will continue to be a primary tool for communication, relationship building, coaching, and support of undergraduate chapters. Respondents saw the benefits of technology use more so than any detrimental factors. National organizations need to continue to cultivate innovative thinking in their use of technology platforms to engage not only undergraduate members but alumni and campus-based professionals. The use of technology allowed for increased engagement across virtual platforms. Technology, in essence, removed barriers for attendance and reduced negative financial implications.

As noted by McCreary and Schutts (2021) fraternities have already experienced an increase in negative behaviors including hazing, high-risk drinking, and those individuals who may join wishing to perpetuate stereotypical behavior. These increases may result in additional resources needed to be allocated by national organizations to combat conduct concerns. In this specific scenario organizations may need to determine a strategy that does not rely solely on technology and provides immersive engagement to positively influence behavior.

Since undergraduate membership may have declined during the duration of the pandemic, national organizations may still suffer from decreased income. If the COVID-19 pandemic impacted their undergraduate students' ability to recruit it could be a short-term resource concern. Conversely, some organizations tried to proactively en-

gage students by developing reward structures and incentives to increase membership throughout the course of 2020/21.

Additional thought should be given on whether more emphasis and support should be developed around increased recruitment and retention efforts to counter any potential revenue losses from the 2020/21 academic year.

Volunteer training and support was an area that was not deeply explored in the participant's responses but could have additional implications for organizations. Forty-three percent of participants were from a hybrid of a paid staff/volunteer driven organization or completely staffed by volunteers. Volunteer staffing structures may have been impacted further by reduced resources available to them to meet the needs for their particular area of support. Oftentimes, volunteer driven organizations may utilize more of their personal resources in service to their respective organizations. They may also have limited access to many of the advanced technological tools that allowed organizations to meet the needs of their student members. National councils may want to seriously consider allocating more resources to volunteer staff in order to meet the demands of their members/student consumers.

Limitations and Implications for Future Research

This research was limited to those who chose to respond to the call for survey participants. While most umbrella organizations were represented, they were not represented equally. Also, there were no respondents from the National Multicultural Greek Council. Further research should attempt to have a more equal representation from all councils and include multicultural groups. Additionally, the survey was completed in the spring and summer 2021 semesters. While respondents were able to reflect on changes that occurred in the current pandemic climate, long-term impacts of COVID-19 cannot yet be determined.

However, multiple respondents indicated changes that occurred during the pandemic are permanent rather than temporary.

A follow up survey with participants in three to five years could provide a better understanding of whether or not changes to PST have continued to meet customer needs in the long term. Using the tenets of ECT, the survey could explore continued levels of satisfaction or dissatisfaction, confirmation of or disconfirmation of beliefs as programs and services continue to evolve. Further, as campuses struggle with unknown impacts on campus culture and student engagement it will be imperative to explore the changes in student life and involvement. What impact have those campuses who have been stringent on face to face activities and promoted remote experiences had on mental health, involvement, conduct, academic success, and retention? As the United States is a patchwork of vaccination requirements and expectations how have colleges adapted their operations and what impact has that had on campus culture? Will campuses with vaccination requirements see different outcomes than peer institutions that have fewer or no expectations for vaccinations against COVID-19?

Conclusion

The impacts of COVID-19 are not fully known, but there is little doubt that the pandemic required the fraternity and sorority community to make some adjustments that may turn into long term adaptations. This research provides insight into how national organization staff and volunteers have adapted to meet student needs during times of budget cuts, virtual programming, and many other modifications made to traditional services. The themes of economic, human and staff resources, technology, and customer service provide understanding of challenges some organizations faced and, more importantly, how organizations used innovative strategies to meet customer expectations and needs in the disruptive time of COVID-19.

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