

Position Paper

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Author Note

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Introduction

Many campuses still lack diversity when it comes to student demographics. In response, campuses are providing cultural and resource centers as a support mechanism for students who may feel out of place. San Diego State University (SDSU), which has recently received designation as a Hispanic serving institution, has made strides to establish many high-impact practices that provide support to commuting students and first years that are not part of other learning communities. The campus is also making strides in its efforts for women and LGBT issues with the creation of the new Pride Center and the planning for a new Women's Center. With these strides in place for providing student support, students are recognizing campus efforts in providing resources for historically underrepresented students. That being said, culturally based fraternities and sororities as well as historically African-American fraternities are not receiving similar levels of attention. Students from these groups have recognized this discrepancy and are now asking for support. Thus, the issue becomes: should culturally based and historically African-American fraternities and sororities receive a dedicated culturally based advisor?

Clarifying the issue

Fraternities and Sororities have been a part of college campuses, in one way or another, since the late 18th century. Phi Beta Kappa is commonly accepted as the first fraternity, with intellect as the common value for membership. While this organization has since transformed into an honorary society, numerous other Greek-lettered organizations have found their way onto college campuses and many institutions around the nation have chapters that are either local or have a tie to national organizations. That said, many of these organizations were established at a time when institutions were occupied by predominantly white, male, and Christian scholars. As

such, the history and ritual of these organizations are also male-centered and designed for the White population. Many practitioners refer to these organizations as historically White fraternities to differentiate them from modern culturally based organizations or historically African-American fraternities and sororities. These culturally based or historically African-American organizations were largely created in the last century with values of culture to create a space for those who were either not allowed to participate in “white organizations” or did not feel like they belonged in existing systems. On many campuses today, these organizations are usually broken up into 4 different groups, the Interfraternity Council (IFC), the general social fraternities; the Panhellenic Council (PHC, or CPA at SDSU), the general social sororities; the United Sorority and Fraternity Council (USFC, sometimes the Multicultural Greek Council); the culturally based organizations; and the National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC), the historically African-American organizations. The Councils serve as a governing body for the organizations, or chapters, and are comprised of members within the respective group.

In the issue discussed today, students of the USFC are asking for their own advisor who may provide support to their council and chapter leadership. Because of the national requirements of the IFC and CPA chapters, advisors are frequently found spending time in their recruitment efforts. Further, because those Councils are comprised of more students, there are often more issues that require management.

USFC is not a nationally bound council, which means that their bylaws are locally delineated and do not have rules that require advisors to be present at their functions and recruitment-related events. Because they are smaller in size, there is a corresponding lower amount of needs that frequently arise. That being said, students who are in leadership roles still note that they do not feel like the advisor roles were created for them. They further noted that they felt like they had a harder time relating to the current advisors since they one was from a

Panhellenic organization, and the other was not Greek. They hoped for someone who looked like them, someone with a shared background that they could relate to.

On the flipside, the act of hiring a dedicated advisor raises other issues and implications as well. First and foremost is the issue of financial resources. A full-time advisor is not simply another salary to be added. In addition to the need to find office space for the staff member, full-time staff will also require benefits, making the addition quite costly. The advisors hired for fraternities and sororities at SDSU are designed to be general positions. From the perspective of human resources, having a specialized advisor on the basis that the current advisors are not relatable can also suggest issues of discrimination based on culture, ethnicities, or race. Last but not least, having a specialized advisor also hinders the idea that the Greek-lettered organizations make up one community. Instead, it continues to promote and foster the idea that the councils are different and segregated instead of cohesive and one body.

Analyzing the Issue

The Pro

The individuals who support hiring a dedicated advisor for the cultural fraternities and sororities are comprised of students who make up membership of the United Sorority and Fraternity Council as well as the National Pan Hellenic Council at San Diego State University. These students believe that by hiring a dedicated advisor for their Councils, they will receive the advising and support that they do not currently have which will lead to better Council cohesion, smoother operations, and a potential increase in membership. These individuals assume that a fulltime staff member will result in improved team performance and that advising is the key issue to membership recruitment. This stems from the underlying idea that current advising is not utilized because the current advisors are dedicated to the Interfraternity Council and College Panhellenic Association.

While more support may result in improved team operations and smoother support, the idea that current advisors cannot be utilized stems from an underlying assumption that they are not created for them based off of their race and ethnicity. This viewpoint is not unheard of as the research of Rendon (1994) indicates that it is important for validation to occur so that students may feel inclined to utilize resources that are available to them. Further, research conducted by Hurtado, S., Clayton-Pedersen, A., Allen, W., & Milem, J. (1998) indicate that Greek-lettered organizations that are less traditional suffer in performance when there is a lack of support in advising and need a supportive campus climate that includes a diverse faculty and staff to succeed. This creates the argument that for validation to occur and to improve climate in the Greek community, a dedicated advisor for culturally based organizations are necessary.

The Con

Creating a full-time position is a process that requires financial resources and demonstrated need. The administrators and leadership within the Division of Student Affairs must be able to demonstrate the fiscal responsibility when creating positions. That said, the entire community at San Diego State University makes up less than ten percent of the student population. These administrators indicate that it is extremely difficult to justify the need for a dedicated advisor, especially when the cultural and historical African American organizations membership makes up approximately 10% of the entire Greek population. Given this, it is difficult to justify hiring a fulltime staff member to address their needs. Further, the administrators are under the assumption that the students are not aware of their actual needs are. They claim that student needs can be addressed by the current advising structure and that the current advisors simply need to provide interventions for support.

Research supporting this viewpoint includes the consideration by Roper and McAloney (2010) where the design for cultural programs are considered and reconsidered. While cultural

programs may serve historically underrepresented students of a single group, they fail to serve students who may have multiple racial identities. The primary concern is the over specialization of cultural programs and a concept of integrated programming to support the multifaceted needs of students.

My Position

With the importance of fiscal responsibility and the lack of demonstrated need in mind, it becomes difficult to recommend the request for a dedicated advisor for culturally based organizations. While the students may need additional advising in support in some aspects of their operations, it is hardly justifiable to request for another fulltime staff member. The original request was based on ability to have an advisor that “looked” like them and was of a similar background. It is illegal to discriminate based on race or ethnicity, and suggesting the creation of a position based on said ground could raise potential legal concerns in that area as well.

That being said, the issues of access and need for additional support in the cultural and historically African American are not to be diminished or unrecognized. As a more fiscally responsible measure, I would recommend the implementation of integrative advising efforts between the Greek Life staff as well as the Center for Intercultural Relations. Further, it is important to be intentional about the time that is spent advising all four Council and supporting the Greek community at San Diego State University. One way that this information can be communicated is through the strategic planning process of the area within Student Life and Leadership. This is a time to work with my supervisor to address this need of the community and understand ways that integrative advising can occur. Further, there should be training developed for future staff members so that they are aware of needs that may not be directly communicated to them. Students should also be brought in to this discussion -- Council leaders should be invited to provide feedback on the proposed plan and better understand how their

needs can be met.

Leadership Implications

Given that the needs of the community are clearly prescribed by Hurtado et al. (1998), it is important for leaders of the institution to consider ways that more meaningful advising can be provided to students of historically underrepresented communities. Often times, this can be masked by other affiliations or identities that are historically privileged. In the case of culturally based and historically African American fraternities and sororities, issues that affect the individual student are still salient and pervasive throughout the organization. It is important to instruct student affairs staff members to intervene and provide validation so that they feel equipped to access resources (Rendon, 1994). It is also important to provide staff with the opportunity to collaborate to develop integrative advising opportunities so that students needs can be met.

Summary of Paper

This position paper deconstructed the question on need for a culturally based advisor dedicated to the culturally based and historically African American fraternities and sororities at San Diego State University. Students supporting the hire indicated a need for higher support and an advisor that can better relate to their experiences and provide the validation needed to persist as individual members and succeed as an organization. On the other hand, administrators indicate that due to lack of demonstrated need that directly correlates to the support a fulltime staff member and small population size, it is not fiscally responsible to add a position based on this justification alone. It is suggested that instead of hiring a dedicated advisor, integrative programming and advising should be provided through students through collaboration with the Center for Intercultural Relations. Communication to administrators and students are critical in maintaining a positive relationship and further leadership implications are provided.

References

- Hurtado, S., Clayton-Pedersen, A., Allen, W., & Milem, J. (1998). Enhancing Campus Climates for Racial/Ethnic Diversity: Educational Policy and Practice. *The Review of Higher Education, 21(3)*, 279-302.
- Rendon, L. (1994). Validating Culturally Diverse Students: Toward A New Model Of Learning And Student Development. *Innovative Higher Education, 33-51*.
- Roper, L., & McAloney, K. (2010). Is the Design for Our Cultural Programs Ethical? *Journal of College and Character*.