



**Research & Development
Strategic Framework Workgroup**

Final Report and Recommendations

June 2016

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to express our appreciation to all of the members who served on this workgroup. Your thoughtful and insightful suggestions added significant value to our collective work. It was a pleasure working with each of you to advance the research focus of the fraternity and sorority profession.

Sharrell Hassell-Goodman
Joshua Schutts
Co-chairs

WORKGROUP MEMBERSHIP

The workgroup was composed of Association members who self-reported an interest in participating with this endeavor. The co-chairs contacted each individual in February, to which every member maintained their interest and accepted their appointment to the workgroup. The workgroup consisted of the following members:

- Jason Bergeron, AFA Board of Directors
- Dr. Trace Camacho, University of Arizona
- Ashlee Canty, Sigma Alpha Epsilon Fraternity
- Dr. Anita Cory, University of Iowa
- Matthew Deeg, The Pennsylvania State University
- Sharrell Hassell-Goodman, George Mason University
- Dr. Gentry McCreary, Dyad Strategies LLC
- Dr. Joshua Schutts, University of West Florida
- Ari Stillman, AFA Central Office
- Viancca Williams, University of South Florida

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This white paper presents the results from the AFA Research & Development Workgroup. This workgroup was charged with the development of a list of recommendations to inform AFA's research agenda. The workgroup had three primary outcomes: (1) curate a list of topical areas that it believes merit earnest inquiry in service of Fraternity/Sorority Life professionals, (2) develop a big-picture strategy for engaging scholars and researchers in the field, and (3) identify metrics or key performance indicators that could help measure the growth and success of AFA's research agenda. The group successfully completed each of its anticipated outcomes. It is the belief of this workgroup that the recommendations presented herein will ensure that research and scholarship attain a greater role within the Association. To that end, we believe that an increased focus on research and scholarly activity will consequently increase the prestige of AFA and the profession of fraternity/sorority advising.

CHARGE

The workgroup was charged with providing recommendations to the Association of Fraternity/Sorority Advisors Board of Directors. These recommendations were to address the following core questions set forth by that body:

- 1. Which areas and questions should guide future research regarding fraternity/sorority members' experience and the profession in general?*
- 2. Who are the scholars who can contribute to the body of knowledge within the fraternity/sorority world—and how can we engage them?*
- 3. What key performance indicators should the Association be using to determine success in the area of research?*

TIMELINE

The workgroup accomplished its work through a series of conference calls. The dates for each call are listed below. Each call separately addressed one core question. Group members provided feedback off-line that enhanced the quality of the conversation. Additionally, the co-chairs provided a progress update for the AFA Board of Directors.

Workgroup calls occurred on:

- March 21, 2016
- April 11, 2016
- April 28, 2016 (AFA Board Update)
- May 2, 2016

Workgroup members began reviewing and offering feedback on this final report in mid-June. The report was finalized on June 27, 2016 and submitted to the AFA Board of Directors.

DOCUMENT REVIEW

The workgroup began by conducting a review of extant documents related to the research history and previously suggested topics and priorities. A cursory review of other higher education association research agendas was also conducted. Special consideration was given to more recent sources. The sources examined were:

- Jelke, T. B. & McDonald, C. G. (2014). *Bibliography (with search terms) of fraternity and sorority research, academic journals and Dissertations, 2009-September 2014*. Center for the Study of the College Fraternity: Bloomington, IN.
- Eberly, C. G. and colleagues (2010). *Bibliography with search terms, research studies and articles, 1996-June 2010*. Center for the Study of the College Fraternity: Bloomington, IN.
- Bureau, D. (2007). Ready for research, but don't know where to start? 10 fraternity/sorority related research topics. *AFA Perspectives*.
- Center for the Study of the College Fraternity (2001). *Suggested research topics and questions*. Retrieved at <http://www.indiana.edu/%7Ecscf/research.htm#topics>

Table 1 displays a map of fraternity/sorority topics to recommendations offered by the AFA/NIC in (Center for the Study of the College Fraternity, 2001), Bureau (2001), and CSCF site visitors (n.d.). These same themes are presented in Figure 1 based on an accounting of the number of fraternity/sorority research articles published. To aid in comparison, an equivalent span of time was compared. The source of these data was the entire Jelke and McDonald (2014) review and a truncation of the Eberly and colleagues (2010) review spanning 2003-2008, but also including anything omitted from Jelke and McDonald (2014) during 2009 and 2010.

Table 1. Map of Previously Suggested Research Themes/Topics from Several Sources

	AFA/NIC (2001)	Bureau (2007)	CSCF Site Visitors
Effectiveness of program outcome attainment	X	X	
Recruitment			
Why students join	X		
Factors contributing to recruitment success			X
Deferred recruitment/joining		X	X
Alcohol and drug	X		
Use over time (pre-college, college, post-college)	X		
Among professionals	X		
Among non-traditional students	X		
Recruitment with alcohol	X		
Student leaders	X		
Connection between values and choices to use/not use	X		
Psychological attributes of alcohol users/non-users	X		
Role of the living environment (chapter housing, residence hall, off campus)	X		
Alcohol free housing effectiveness	X		
Effectiveness of social norming approaches	X		
Effectiveness of active mentoring programs	X		
Knowledge, understanding, and implementation of risk management policies	X		

Table 1. Continued

	AFA/NIC (2001)	Bureau (2007)	CSCF Site Visitors
Effectiveness of parental notification programs	X		
Academic misconduct			
Civic engagement and community service attitudes and beliefs	X		
How male behavior influences female behavior (and vice versa)	X		
Attitudes and beliefs, about f/s	X		
Parent attitudes and beliefs			X
Faculty attitudes and beliefs			X
The non-affiliate f/s advisor perspective			X
Multiculturalism and the Impact of culturally-based organizations		X	
Leadership development and character building		X	
The experiences and outcomes for micro-populations			
Persons of color		X	
First generation students			
First year students			
Sophomores		X	
Seniors		X	
LGBTQ			X
Identity Development			
Gender and Sexuality		X	
Race and race relations		X	
Religion and spirituality		X	
Social identity and org. commitment			
Hazing		X	
Risk knowledge, awareness, and management		X	
Values, ethics, and morals		X	
Alumni success, involvement, and giving			X

LIMITATIONS

No study is without limitations. In the scope of this work, the workgroup acknowledges its findings and recommendations are limited by the following:

- **Committee size and composition.** We acknowledge that the workgroup was comprised of volunteers who self-selected an interest in serving on this committee. Final committee membership was then determined by the AFA Board of Directors. We assert that self-selection bias is possible in such designs. It was our belief that the workgroup, although small in number, represented a diverse cross section the AFA membership.
- **Limited number of sources.** We acknowledge that the workgroup reviewed a limited number of sources to guide topic identification and analysis. The annotated bibliographies come from a single document, which may have missed relevant sources.
- **Methodology.** We acknowledge that an initially large list of topics needed to be refined into a manageable amount. In this case, a summative process based on sorting was employed. This process is subjective in nature, but we recognized it as a fair way approach to consider every respondent’s perspective.

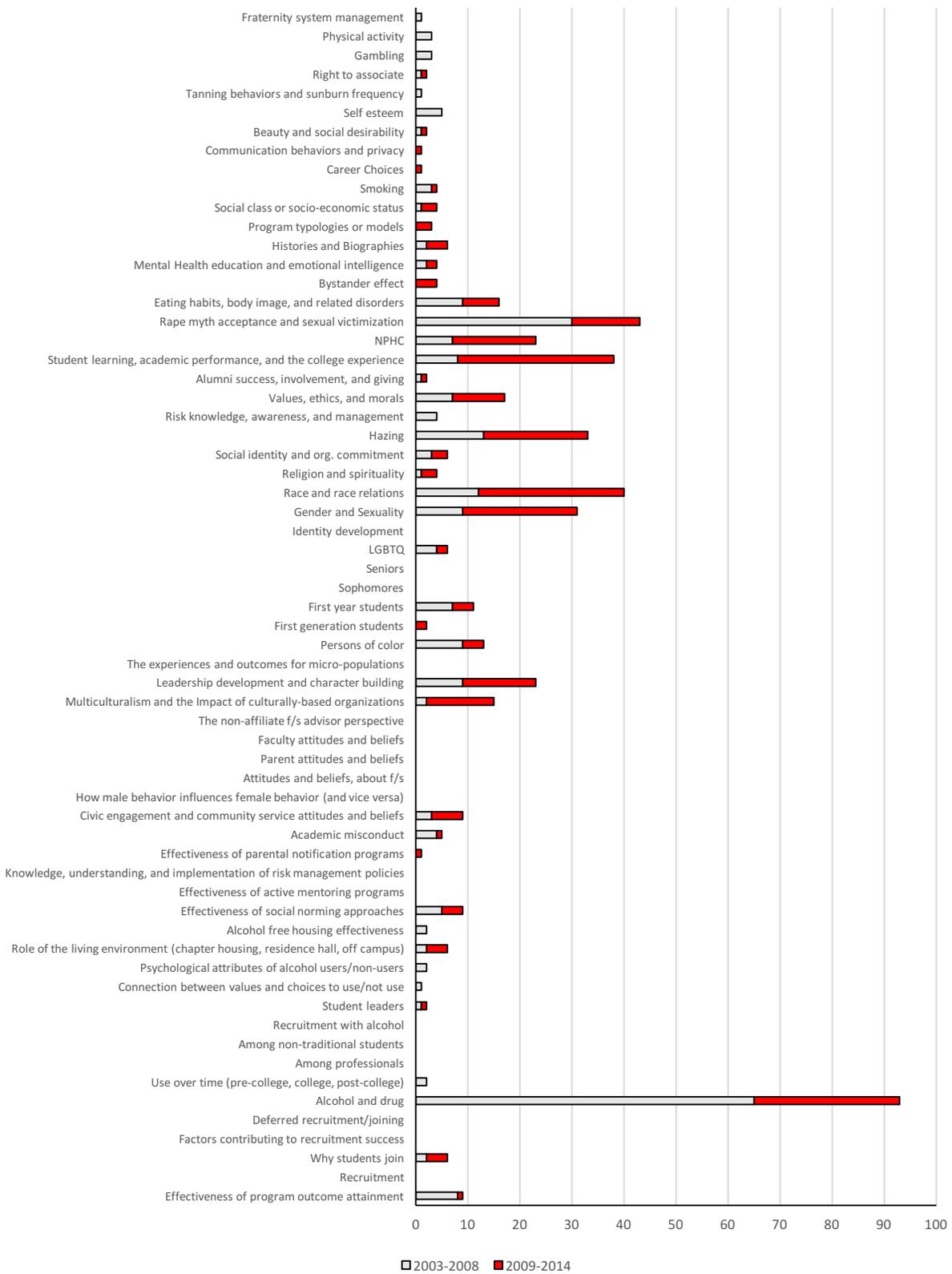


Figure 1. Bar Chart of Fraternity/Sorority Articles by Topic (2003-2014)

RECOMMENDATIONS

Research Questions, Topics, and General Areas of Focus

The workgroup generated a preliminary list of research questions, topics, and focus areas that—from our perspective—would benefit from additional scholarly attention. A preliminary list was developed containing 45 topics/questions, which we then sought to refine. Refinement was conducted through a prioritization process that accounted for the audience(s) that would most likely be effected by such topics (e.g., FSL campus-based professionals, umbrella organizations, and inter/national fraternities and sororities). Topics received a score of “1” if a respondent indicated further research in the area would significantly impact the campus FSL advisor, or both the campus FSL advisor and the umbrella/national groups equally. The number of “1s” for each topic were summed to form a composite score. This reduced the number of possible topics and demonstrated alignment with the mission of AFA and its role in the development of campus-based professionals.

A complete listing of the research topics and their ratings is presented in the Appendix. The final list of ten questions, topics, and focus areas all received composite scores of 7 or 8 (out of 8), and is presented in Table 1 with no particular order.

Table 2. Final List

Topics /Focus Areas	Guiding Considerations
An examination of chapter transformation	Explanatory studies, case studies, longitudinal analyses, and causal modeling approaches; tipping points, precursors, predictors, and leading indicators for change
Preparing F/S members for the post-graduate world	An identification and assessment of key experiences in fraternity/sorority life and the demonstrated impact of these experiences
The benefits of culturally-based fraternities and sororities, particularly at PWIs	The impact on retention and graduation of students of color; how membership helps these students cope with experienced micro-aggressions
How the F/S influences one’s beliefs and actions	The intersection of one’s personal ethics, morals, values, and beliefs and those of the fraternity/sorority
Programming and leadership development initiatives focused on the long-standing issues (e.g., hazing, alcohol and drug use/abuse, sexual misconduct, diversity and inclusion)	Best and promising practices; the effectiveness of these efforts; identifiable outcomes and assessment methods to demonstrate success; an accurate depiction of the extent to which these issues are reflective of our communities
The impact of the transgender conversation	Specifically, with respect to policy, practice, and future directions

Table 1. Continued.

Topics /Focus Areas	Guiding Considerations
The profession of FSL	Qualities, skills, and characteristics of effective professionals, areas for continued learning and professional development; organizational behavior research or studies conducted on students that can be reimagined for the fraternity/sorority professional; the exploration of an optimal or ideal ratio of professionals to students; departure from the field; the long-term retention to the field (seasoned professionals)
FSL within the larger academy	Faculty attitudes, beliefs, and dispositions; the high-impact nature of FSL; the extent to which FSL may hinder or support student involvement in other experiential or high-impact activities (e.g., internships, study abroad, service-learning, undergraduate research projects); the role FSL plays in student learning from traditional perspectives (e.g., problem solving, oral and written communication skills, teamwork skills, critical thinking, ethical reasoning, etc.)
Corollaries and consequences of student engagement in FSL	To include such things as extra-role behaviors, institutional or organizational commitment, attachment, and organizational citizenship behaviors

Scholar Engagement

The workgroup next focused its conversation around the recruitment and engagement of experts in the field. Dialogue regarding incentives to study FSL also occurred. The workgroup also identified national instruments that produce data that might be helpful if F/S membership was a variable. In light of these directions, we offer the following recommendations:

- Underscore and demonstrate the positive impact of F/S experiences.
- Continue efforts to legitimize FSL research within the academy.
- Develop opportunities at undergraduate conferences to engage students interested in FSL from the perspective of social science research.
- Replicate novel studies in various social science disciplines (e.g., business, psychology, sociology, anthropology) within the context of FSL.
- Develop research-focused mentoring relationships that pair graduate students interested in FSL research with AFA members who have a working knowledge of empirical research.

- Leverage members who are engaged in AFA and other research-related conferences, and consider developing research symposia or research summits at these conferences (e.g., ASHE, AERA, ACPA, NASPA, etc.).
- Explore the possibility of a *New Directions* series or *Higher Ed Live* sessions on FSL with invited researchers contributing to the content and/or serving as co-editors.
- Implement invited research panels at the AFA Annual Meeting with key researchers. Couple the large panel session with breakout sessions for attendees to enhance their understanding.
- Develop a database of higher education/student affairs graduate programs that have a thesis requirement or option (masters) or dissertation. Conduct targeted outreach to those faculty and students for the expressed purposes of cultivating new scholarship and creative activity and the general dissemination of *Oracle*.
- Foster partnerships with individuals on the research teams of major national surveys, such as the EBI, National College Health Assessment, Multi-Institutional Study of Leadership, Cooperative Institutional Research Program, National Survey of Student Engagement, National Study on Student Learning, and the National LGBT Survey of Student Success. These partnerships should be aligned with our research agenda and promote access to the scholarship and creative activity disseminated by these research groups.
- Develop a data mart/data warehouse that could be made available to researchers, similar to the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) managed by the National Center for Education Statistics.
- Send free copies of *Oracle* to higher education graduate programs, perhaps even in printed form for easy access.
- Identify the extent to which all or most institutions have access to *Oracle* electronically through its present indexing software.
- Create a searchable database within *Oracle* by author, title, subject matter or key words to facilitate easier access to information.
- Publicize *Oracle* research in editorials that can be easily picked up by media sources. This may allow AFA to capitalize on research as a form of positive public relations.
- Explore the possibility of partnering with the Association for the Study of Higher Education (ASHE) to develop workshops, webinars, collaborations, and other professional development related to improving members' research skills.

- Explore mechanisms to for invited presentations at AFA meetings and publication in *Oracle*, particularly targeted to researchers from outside FSL at researchers from outside FSL.
- Consider ways and opportunities to partner with national and umbrella organizations to support research on FSL.
- Design pathways for novice researchers to publish their research, develop key research skills and receive mentoring from experts in the field.
- Develop strategies to ensure that diverse populations within FSL remain a research priority across all of the aforementioned research topics/ideas.

Key Performance Indicators

Finally, the workgroup gave attention to the identification of key performance indicators (KPIs), measures or metrics that could be used to demonstrate the ongoing success of AFA’s research agenda. Given the number of indicators related to *Oracle*, it is further recommended that steps be taken to develop process-related documentation, transparent reporting protocols, and assessment for continuous improvement.

Much of the Association’s work has shifted based on the more recent AFA staff support paradigm. *Oracle* would stand to benefit from experiencing this same collaboration. It is recommended that AFA staff take a more active leadership role in the publication of *Oracle*. The editors and members of the editorial board serve as volunteers—and will always have to navigate the delicate balance between their regular day-to-day responsibilities and those of their many other volunteer commitments. Having a team of dedicated individuals manage the processes involved in developing and disseminating *Oracle* would be a tremendous asset all stakeholders. This model could also explore various additional possibilities, such as institutional partnerships (e.g., Colorado State, University of Georgia, etc.) or the use of graduate students during the summer months. An earnest exploration of how technology might assist in the efficiency and transparency of this process is also recommended. Finally, a reconsideration of how editorial role structures might exist in a manner that divides the workload, marshal expertise and experience in the most effective directions possible, and provides transparency to potential scholars and researchers is also of great value.

In light of these directions, we offer the following recommended KPIs. **Unless otherwise indicated, it is expected that these KPIs would increase over time, and that measurement would occur on an annual basis.**

- Number of presentations and associated faculty members/researchers presenting original research at the AFA Annual Meeting.
- Number of submissions to *Oracle*.

- Number of scholarly articles related to FSL in other peer-reviewed journals, to include ancillary disciplines.
- Impact factor of *Oracle*.
- Review time for *Oracle* submissions (Benchmark: three months or less).
- Analytic data on unique page views or downloads of *Oracle* issues or articles.
- Number of administrations of the Fraternity/Sorority Experience Survey (FSES).
- Amount of FSL research presented at ASHE, NASPA, ACPA, and ASCA conferences.
- Number of applications for the masters/doctoral awards through CSCF.
- Number of research grant applications.
- Amount of research grant dollars awarded.

APPENDIX

Completing listing of proposed research topics and exemplar research questions

Questions/Topics/ Focus Areas	Primary Benefactor			
	Campus FSA	National/ Umbrella	Both	Neither
Research that address the negative narrative of what F/S students: Rich kids with privilege who are not diverse, drink too much, haze, rape, and commit acts other acts of violence. To what extent do we actually reflect these things?	0	3	4	1
F/S life and hard drugs	1	2	4	1
The specific effect (and effectiveness of) alcohol free housing	1	5	2	0
Greek vs. non-Greek outcome differences from other big national studies	0	1	6	1
Financial aid, working while in college, how one finances their college or membership in the organization	1	1	3	3
Replication of studies into rape culture (e.g., 1 in 4) and racial understanding with the goal of increased generalizability	2	1	4	1
The effectiveness of new models of education, pledging, and member development (e.g., Beta Theta Pi, SigEp)	0	5	3	0
A critical examination or case study approach with chapters that made transformational change in a problem area to find out what got them from “A to B” (sequential explanatory strategy)	2	0	6	0
NPHC groups (generally)	2	1	4	1
The fraternal experiences that prepare collegians for the post-grad world, and how much success can we demonstrate in those experiences.	0	1	7	0
The effect of single-sex organizational involvement on development, sexual experiences, academic performance, well-being, identity development, mental health, etc.	1	4	3	0
What are the indicators within the collegiate experience that prompt positive alumni involvement, and how can we create lifelong affinity, action, and involvement?	0	4	4	0
What does “fraternity done right” look like in terms of membership development programming?	1	3	4	0

Table continued.

Questions/Topics/ Focus Areas	Primary Benefactor			
	Campus FSA	National/ Umbrella	Both	Neither
Best and promising practices/strategies to address hazing, dangerous alcohol behavior, sexual assault	2	0	5	1
The benefits of culturally based groups and what retention look like for these groups at PWIs?	3	0	4	0
Local organizations	3	1	2	2
Fraternity and sorority impact after graduation and its long term effects. How has F/S hindered or helped one's development in the workplace? What qualitative information can help explain the how and why?	1	2	4	1
How can connect causation to attitudes and beliefs structures?	0	0	3	5
Organizational effect on individuals' beliefs and actions. What can we observe about the ethics/morality of individuals and their interaction with the ethics/morality of the chapter itself. How does it create a tipping point within an organization? How does this influence culture change?	2	1	5	0
UIFI, IFI and IMPACT – How can these experiences (leadership programs) create cultural change?	4	2	1	1
Effective best and promising practices in educational or leadership development programming	0	0	8	0
The nature of accountability in theory and practice (standards w/in chapters, international organization, university, etc.) in building a culture of excellence in sororities and fraternities	0	0	8	0
Application and effective use of technology, and specifically how can it be used to meet students where they are. How do we compare the previous programs with current programs and training (on-line vs. in person training)?	0	2	5	0
Why alumni volunteer, remain engaged or disengage, and associated predictors	0	8	0	0
The role of volunteerism in the F/S college experience. What kind of service, citizenship did students involve themselves in and how are they continuing to be involved as alumni? Effects of institutional recognition on service involvement (i.e., altruism or for recognition)	2	4	2	0

Table continued.

Questions/Topics/ Focus Areas	Primary Benefactor			
	Campus FSA	National/ Umbrella	Both	Neither
How do previous models of new member education compare in terms of effectiveness and desirable outcomes vs. newer models?	0	5	3	0
The role and effect of chapter housing on culture, specifically with respect to hazing, alcohol use, sexual assault, leadership development, student learning, etc.	1	3	4	0
How are sexual violence and victim blaming related to cultural norms, and perhaps similar or different among majority/non-majority cultures?	2	1	4	1
How has the transgendered conversation impacted policy and practice in F/S life? What future trends might exist?	1	1	6	0
To what extent have we fully examined diversity, inclusion, and social justice from the lens of Critical Race Theory?	3	0	3	2
Exit survey results from former association members that have departed the field. What are the core issues they identify as reasons for departure?	8	0	0	0
Persistence survey results to senior/seasoned association members regarding why they have retained membership over a prolonged period of time.	7	0	1	0
The effectiveness of leading programs to combat hazing, sexual assault. Do they state desired learning or experience outcomes? How are they assessed? What findings are there?	2	0	6	0
Dynamics of NIC, NPC, NPHC, understanding diversity and inclusion – how do we advance the conversation. How have attitudes regarding diversity and inclusion begun to change? What are the practices helping them see themselves as one community? Are there best and promising practices in the field of community development?	1	2	5	0
Activism in organizations and opportunities for activism, particularly considering some of our organizations were founded on these principles?	3	2	2	1
What attitudes exist among the faculty toward F/S life?	7	0	1	0
To what extent is the F/S program a “high impact practice”? Is involvement with the fraternity/sorority potentially hindering students’ involvement in other organizations (e.g., study abroad, internships, etc.)?	4	0	4	0

Table continued.

Question/Topic/ Focus Area	Primary Benefactor			
	Campus FSA	National/ Umbrella	Both	Neither
To what extent are we studying the effects of F/S life on the more academic domains of student learning (e.g., problem solving, communication skills, critical thinking, ethical reasoning, etc.)	2	1	5	0
To what extent does involvement in F/S life contribute to professional and career readiness and career exploration?	2	1	4	1
Organizational citizenship behaviors within our fraternal organizations, and the factors that influence students' engagement in the FSL community and exhibition of extra-role behaviors	1	1	6	0
How does membership in NPHC organizations help students cope with micro-aggressions in PWIs to persist in graduation?	4	0	4	0
The role of leadership in one's organization and how such experiences assist with your career development, particularly in large organizations	0	1	6	1
The impact of having, for example, a 1:300 vs. a 1:1500 FSL professional-to-student ratio on a campus? Can we arrive at an ideal ratio to inform staffing needs based on patterns across the country?	8	0	0	0
Evidence-based pretest and posttest interventions to document effectiveness of fraternity/sorority educational programming	1	1	5	1
Longitudinal data on GPA and membership retention	0	0	7	1

Notes: N = 8