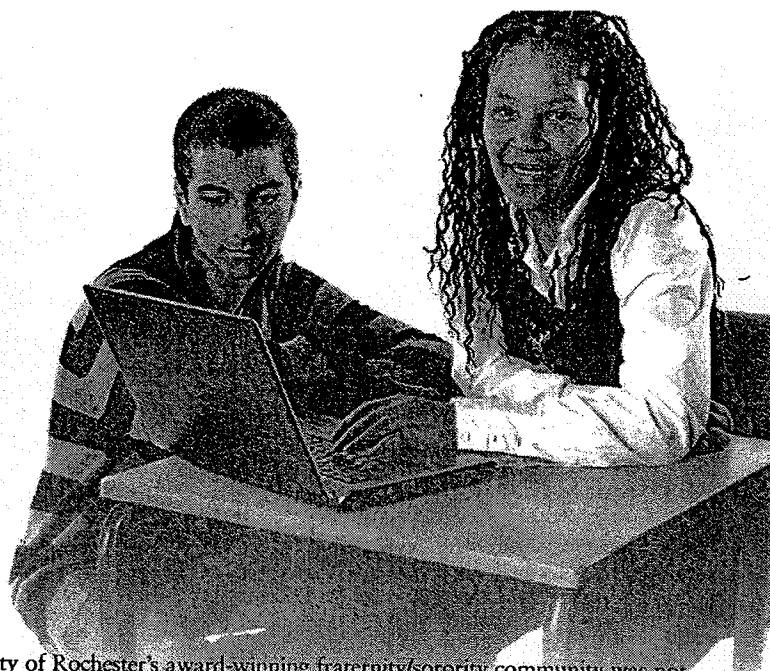


The Exploration of a Model for Excellence: Creating Relevant Fraternal Communities

By Monica Miranda Smalls



“To fully internalize a regulation, and thus to become autonomous with respect to it, people must inwardly grasp its meaning and worth. It is these meanings that become internalized and integrated in environments that provide supports for the needs for competence, relatedness, and autonomy.”

(Ryan & Deci, 2000)

The University of Rochester's award-winning fraternity/sorority community was not always functioning as such. In 2003, the University's College of Arts, Sciences and Engineering convened a committee to conduct an in-depth examination of fraternities and sororities similar to the types of reviews that were occurring in other areas of the University. The Committee to Review Fraternities and Sororities spent a year listening to presentations from a variety of offices and student groups (both fraternal and non-fraternal) and created a list of recommendations, which included the need to create a set of shared standards that would strengthen the community and clarify the expectations of fraternities and sororities. This recommendation prompted a review of the literature on student development and motivational theory, and a thorough assessment of the educational philosophy, culture, and principles of the College as well as its recognized fraternities and sororities. Two years later a model of excellence was created by a separate committee, the Fraternity and Sorority Standards Sub-Committee, prompting the initial goal of creating a strong, viable, College-centered community. This article describes the distinct parts of the University of Rochester (UR) model that provide a framework any campus can use for the creation of a success-driven model when examining and modifying its cultures and subcultures to strengthen a fraternity and sorority community.

Institutional Culture and Values

In 1995, the College developed a distinctive, curricular vision based on the simple idea that “students learn best when they have the freedom to study what they love” (UR website). The curriculum imposes minimal requirements and provides an opportunity for students to pursue their passions and interests. Soon after, the Communal Principles of the College were created to include Community, Freedom, Responsibility, Respect, Honesty, and Fairness. Areas including Residential Life and Housing, Athletics, and Student Government were undergoing reviews, all building on the curricular vision. With the College's values and culture affirmed, it was committed to clarifying and understanding the nature of the fraternity and sorority student culture (Kuh, 1990). The goal was to develop a framework based upon the College culture that encouraged the cultural values, expectations, and practices of fraternities and sororities to be consistent with the values and academic mission of the College.

Review of Best Practices

Throughout the process, comparisons and examples of best practices related to the fraternity and sorority review processes, standards, recruitment strategies, community service, and other aspects of fraternity and sorority life were reviewed. Some institutions and organizations studied were Drexel University, Cornell University, Grand Valley State University, California State University-Chico, Randolph Macon College, Colgate University, Harvard University, Alfred State University, Union College, Alpha Phi Fraternity, and Delta Gamma Fraternity. The *Call for Values Congruence* (Franklin Square Group, 2005) was prominent in the committee's research, as it addressed the need for congruence with values and actions, which resonated with the College. Comparisons were useful in defining what fit the institution's value and culture as well as what did not.

continued on page 10

Review of Relevant Research

As a research institution, no system-wide evaluation could occur in the College without reviewing the literature. Studies pertaining to student development and leadership by George Kuh, Ernest Pascarella, and Susan Komives, among others; motivational theory by Richard Ryan and Edward Deci; and organizational leadership by Lee Bolman and Terrance Deal were key in the review process. Kathleen Manning's work in campus cultures, especially her expertise in innovative practices in student affairs, was utilized extensively in the development of this community. A variety of articles and manuscripts related to fraternities and sororities were also utilized, including the work of Gary Pike, Jerry Askew, Andrew Wall, Daniel Bureau, and the Franklin Square Group. The synthesis and integration of theory and research from several disciplines resulted in the creation of what is referred to as a "success-driven model" developed by the College.

Method and Hallmark Initiative

A total of 58 trustees, alumni, deans, faculty, staff, students, and one parent worked to examine every aspect of fraternity and sorority life beginning in 2003, which culminated in the creation of the Expectations for Excellence Program in 2006. The Expectations for Excellence Program is the hallmark of the success-driven model for the community. It represents the effort to create a framework based upon the College culture that encourages cultural values, expectations, and practices of fraternities and sororities consistent with the values and academic mission of the College.

This program emphasizes goal-setting, planning, and self-assessing in an accreditation model of accountability. The five categories of the Expectations for Excellence Program are Scholarship, Community Building and Leadership, Programming, Non-Academic Student Conduct, and Organizational

Management. At the end of the year, each chapter makes an annual presentation and provides an annual report to the Fraternity and Sorority Standards Sub-Committee, indicating how successful their efforts were, and submits its plan for the next year. The committee that previously reviewed the plans then makes decisions regarding whether or not to accredit the organization. The group provides extensive, written feedback to the chapters on their plans. Groups can receive commendation through this process, may be mandated to change or to improve plans for the future, or may ultimately lose recognition by the College.

Engaging a large group of stakeholders throughout this review and the creative process encouraged clear and transparent discussions and processes and led to a program supporting the College principles of freedom, responsibility, and community. The Expectations for Excellence Program further encourages student participation and leadership roles throughout the College-community, fosters student choice and informed decision-making, and provides student leaders with information and training that allows them to grow (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

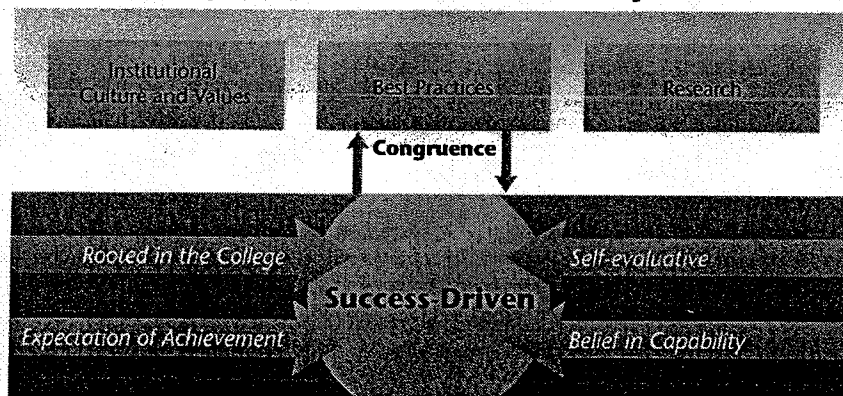
Promising Developments

Kuh (1993) says, "Appraising an institution's character is complicated and time consuming. Do not underestimate the amount of time required to discover, understand, and appreciate the institution's character" (p. 666). While this is a process that seems replicable on any campus, the key to success will be clearly defining that particular institution's academic mission and values prior to integrating and aligning its fraternities' and sororities' cultures and subcultures. Creating systems and processes that are aligned may prompt successes such as increased collaborative programming, increased communication between the campus and its fraternal organizations, as well as a positive impact on student learning, recruitment, and retention.

Other promising developments within the UR fraternity/sorority community have included:

- The sorority community realized a 3 percent growth during the 2007-2008 academic year.

Congruence of a Success-Driven System



Success-Driven Model

When developing the revised fraternity and sorority success model, the focus was on three informational vectors: (1) a very thorough institutional review, (2) available research and theory about such topics as learning, culture, and motivation, and (3) a comprehensive analysis of best practices used at other institutions. Once completed, these three vectors were combined with the fraternity/sorority community-wide efforts to find congruence among the institutional mission and the fraternal cultures (the charters and stated beliefs of fraternities/sororities), as well as a belief that the fraternity/sorority community should be self-evaluative and rooted in the College. Because the College's mission/philosophy was grounded in Ryan and Deci's (2000) self-determination theory, administrators insisted upon developing a framework that assumed that fraternity and sorority members could be and wanted to be successful. The College's role was to expect, believe in, and provide support for their success.

- All six National Panhellenic Conference (NPC) chapters are at or above the campus total (50) and all reached quota at 22 in the spring of 2009 for the first time in at least 10 years.
- One-third of the 30 active chapters received national, regional, or local awards in the 2007-2008 academic year. Two sororities and one fraternity received top inter/national chapter awards. Two UR NPC sorority chapter presidents were recognized with inter/national outstanding chapter president of the year awards.
- Fraternity and sorority members have been increasingly involved in Student Association government.
 - In the last four years each Student Association President has been a fraternity member and the last two of three Vice Presidents have been sorority women.
 - Sixty-five percent of the Student Senate for 2007-2008 were members of fraternities/sororities.
 - The Chief Justice of the All-Campus Judicial Council since 2005 has been a member of a fraternity. The last two Associate Chief Justices have been fraternity or sorority members.
 - Seventy-five percent of the 2009 Class Council leadership are fraternity/sorority members.
- The UR Fraternity/Sorority System received the National Association of Student Personnel Association (NASPA) Bronze Excellence Award in the category of Student Union, Student Activities, Greek Life, Leadership and related programs in March 2007 (Smalls, Rinefierd, & Stillman).
- Alumni involvement & engagement has increased.
 - The number of Meliora Weekend (annual reunion and family weekend) alumni-related events hosted by fraternities/sororities increased.
 - The Office of Alumni Relations and the Office of Fraternity and Sorority Affairs

hosted regional fraternity/sorority alumni dinners. The first were hosted in Boston, MA in March 2008 and Denver, CO in December 2008.

- Since 2005, two students, upon graduation, have been hired by their inter/national organizations to serve as collegiate leadership consultants. One UR alumni currently serves as a national headquarters staff member serving as the Associate Director of Chapter Services.
- For the 2007-2008 academic year, 30 percent of the non-athletic programs included during the six College community weekends were directly supported by fraternities or sororities either via volunteering their time to assist with setting up or coordinating the day or directly co-sponsoring the planning and promotion of the event.

The College's intersection of its belief in its students' capability and the expectation of achievement based in a College-centered and self-evaluative system has prompted an expanding and thriving fraternity and sorority community at the University of Rochester. Organizations have significantly increased their expectations of members by delineating their responsibilities more clearly and working in conjunction with the office of the Dean of Students, holding members accountable collaboratively with the College. The UR fraternity and sorority community has welcomed 300 new members this spring recruitment season, a 27 percent increase from spring 2008 and a 56 percent increase since prior to the implementation of the success-driven model and the Expectations for Excellence Program process in the Spring of 2005. The College has intentionally invested in supporting a relevant fraternity and sorority community by aligning the cultures of the fraternities and sororities and the College through a paradigm of shared values.

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- *Monica Miranda Smalls serves as the Director of Fraternity and Sorority Affairs for the University of Rochester's Office of the Dean of Students. She is a 2008 recipient of the AFA Sue Kraft Fussell Distinguished Service Award. She also serves as chair of the board of trustees for Omega Phi Beta Sorority, Inc.*

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