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TEN ISSUES LATER: RETROSPECTIVE AND PROSPECTS

J. Patrick Biddix
Oracle Editor

In 2005, the Association of Fraternity/Sorority Advisors published Volume 1, Issue 1 of *Oracle*. The first editor, Grahame Hesp, wrote of the occasion, “It is the hope that *Oracle: The Research Journal of the Association of Fraternity Advisors* will promote scholarly discourse among partners invested in the college fraternal movement and provide the primary repository for the factual data.” *Oracle*’s debut was sparked by the 2000-2005 Strategic Plan, which sought to professionalize the Association.

This issue marks the tenth publication of *Oracle*. During that time, we have made considerable strides toward meeting the initial mission of the journal. The foundation laid by the leadership of Hesp, Dan Bureau, Monica Miranda Smalls, Eric Norman, and Jeremiah Shinn has allowed us to progress toward becoming a primary venue for research on the field and profession. We increasingly see *Oracle* cited in other publications and article submissions come from both new and established researchers, as well broad academic fields. We have remained committed to developing practitioner-scholars as well as cultivating, expanding, and preserving research in the field.

The Association emphasized the place of research more boldly in the most recently adopted 2011-2013 Strategic Plan. In that document, AFA recognized Research and Development Strategic Goal 2, stating “AFA will engage in and advocate for both academic and applied research related to the fraternity/sorority experience and advising profession.” The Outcome statement offered some direction to expand and validate research, and Objectives include research incentive programs, partnerships with research-based associations, and raising the awareness and expanding the readership of *Oracle*. With the latter in mind, we have begun to make intentional efforts at getting *Oracle* into the hands of educators who may not be connected with AFA – including practitioners, graduate students, and program preparation faculty. These include an open access format for all issues, print editions of *Oracle*, and continued progress toward indexing. Through these research connections, we look to expand our community of support for the college fraternal movement.

Three of the four articles in this issue draw data from nationally representative datasets, while the fourth offers a review of contemporary literature on the field published outside of *Oracle*. First, Bureau, Ryan, Ahren, Shoup, and Torres drew on nationally representative data from the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) to explore student learning and developmental differences between fraternity/sorority members and unaffiliated students. Their findings offer an important contribution to the data on educational outcomes of membership. Second, Long used nationally representative data from the AFA/EBI Fraternity/Sorority Assessment to examine differences in educational gains among gay, bisexual, and questioning (GBQ) fraternity members, as compared to heterosexual members. He found heterosexual members experienced greater personal gains measures, but there was no difference between GBQ identifying members and heterosexual members on alcohol use, leadership experience, and satisfaction.

Next, Goldfarb and Eberly used nationally representative data from the College Students' Beliefs and Values Survey, sponsored by the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) to consider the relationship between fraternal affiliation, masculinity, and various spirituality/religious factors. Their findings offer intriguing implications for enhancing advising practice and chapter programming. Finally, Perkins, Zimmerman, and Janosik conducted a review of recent research from higher education journals. Their findings offer a resource for trends and outcomes from empirical research on the fraternity/sorority membership, which can serve as both a starting point for new research or a source for quick information on contemporary membership outcomes.

As befitting this "tenth anniversary" issue, the four articles not only exemplify Hesp's initial vision for Oracle, but meet Strategic Goal 2's outcome of expanding and validating research. The breadth of perspectives, methodological depth, and generalizable aspects of each study should attract citations to subsequent work as well as inform evidence-based fieldwork.