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## : Examining the Decision to Pursue Fraternity/Sorority Advising as

### EXAMINING THE DECISION TO PURSUE FRATERNITY/SORORITY ADVISING AS A CAREER

KAHLIN McKEOWN, FARMHOUSE INTERNATIONAL FRATERNITY

*Limited research exists that considers the decision to pursue student affairs as a career, and there is no known research to examine the decision to specifically pursue fraternity/sorority advising. This qualitative, narrative analysis study centers the career decision-making of seven professionals in fraternity/sorority advising roles. Findings indicate that participants experienced a “light-bulb” moment when student affairs became a potential future career, and advisors and mentors were influential in these decisions. Prioritization of fraternity/sorority advising roles in both graduate programs and professional positions was apparent, and motivation to continue in the field is also addressed.*

Fraternity/sorority professionals have influence on students, organizations, volunteers, and campus communities. These professionals have a broad reach on and off campus and interact frequently with undergraduate leaders, volunteers who serve as chapter advisors, and community members to advance the ideals and values upon which fraternities and sororities were founded. While there is some existing literature on how student affairs professionals choose this career path and factors that influence their decision, (Forney, 1994; Hunter, 1992; Marshall et al., 2016; Richard & Sherman, 1991; Taub & McEwen, 2006), it is not expansive. Additionally, there is limited literature that centers those who work in the functional area of fraternity/sorority life (FSL), and there is no known research on how individuals choose to pursue a career in fraternity/sorority advising.

Koepsell and Stillman (2016) found that 57% of members in the Association of Fraternity/Sorority Advisors (AFA) have between zero and five years of membership in the Association and suggested that many fraternity/sorority professionals may be new in their roles with little experience. In contrast to more general student affairs figures, which estimate that 15-20% of student affairs professionals have between zero and five years of experience, the number of new professionals in AFA is disproportionately high (Renn & Hodges, 2007; Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008). The mismatch of these figures suggests

that staff attrition is occurring at higher rates than in other student affairs departments, and less experienced staff are managing organizations with high levels of risk.

Burnout in the field of student affairs has been a challenge for some time (Hayashida, 2019; Marshall et al., 2016; Steiner, 2019; Tull et al., 2009). Burnout is one reason that professionals may leave the field of fraternity/sorority advising or student affairs entirely and can lead to higher turnover (Steiner, 2019; Tull et al., 2009). Turnover in student affairs is a significant issue for universities as financial resources are strained and more accountability is expected of student affairs professionals, sometimes leading to the expectation of long hours and high expectations that can contribute to burnout (Pritchard & McChesney 2018; Steiner, 2019, Tull et al., 2009) The fraternity/sorority profession faces similar challenges. Departure from the field of student affairs is estimated between 20% and 40%, mostly within the first six years (Tull et al., 2009). Student affairs professionals reportedly leave the field because of low overall job satisfaction, work environment issues, declining morale, and transition issues from graduate school to professional life (Marshall et al., 2016).

To supplement existing literature and given the statistics, it is important to consider why and how individuals decide to pursue fraternity/sorority advising as a career. Research may help in preventing burnout leading to turnover or

developing interventions to encourage longevity in the field beyond five years. The purpose of this article is to explore how those in the fraternity/sorority profession describe their decision to pursue this career path using a narrative inquiry approach.

## Literature Review

### *Student Affairs as a Career Choice*

Student affairs is considered a “hidden profession” (Richmond & Sherman, 1991, p. 8), since students who pursue a career in student affairs do not discover this possibility until they matriculate into a college/university setting. As a result, recruiting qualified students to pursue student affairs work is limited (Taub & McEwen, 2006). Additionally, the decision to pursue student affairs work is not well-understood (Taub & McEwen, 2006). Of the limited research that exists, few studies focused on the reasons for enrolling in master’s programs and factors that influenced students to consider careers in student affairs. Hunter (1992) found four themes that influenced students’ decisions to pursue the field: encouragement by current student affairs professionals, undergraduate employment in a student affairs area, shared values, and a desire to contribute to campus life. Forney (1994) more broadly asked master’s students their reasons for choosing student affairs, and found that participants cited “working with students, contributing to student development, and the attractiveness of the college atmosphere” (p. 340).

Taub and McEwen (2006) conducted a quantitative study to distinguish between race, gender, and age when examining the factors considered to pursue this work. While they were not able to determine significant differences related to identity, Taub and McEwen (2006) found that of their sample of 300 master’s students, 46% of them became aware of student affairs late in their college career, mostly in their third or fourth year. Taub and McEwen also had

consistent findings to those of Hunter (1992) and Forney (1994) in sources of information used when considering a student affairs career and attraction to working in student affairs. Taub and McEwen (2006) found that the two sources of information most frequently used when considering student affairs as a career were talking with a student affairs professional (88.6%) and involvement in student activities (82.6%) which is consistent with previous findings (Hunter, 1992). Students in Taub and McEwen’s (2006) study also attributed their attraction to working in student affairs to the appeal of working in a campus environment (72.7%) and the opportunity to do work they found personally fulfilling (72%) consistent with previous findings (Forney, 1994). However, much of the research in this area focuses on master’s students pursuing a degree in student affairs (Forney, 1994; Hunter, 1992; Taub & McEwen, 2006). This approach may not capture all relevant perspectives as not all student affairs professionals have a master’s degree before entering the field (Tull et al., 2009). Fraternity/sorority professionals also have another path to pursue work in fraternity/sorority advising if they begin working for an Inter/National headquarters or in volunteer positions since many of these roles do not require a master’s degree.

### *Fraternity and Sorority Advising as a Career*

Pursuing a career in fraternity/sorority advising is a niche interest within student affairs, an already unique and small field. Fraternity/sorority professionals have a wide range of responsibility, from budget management to personnel decisions, to managing some of the highest levels of risk within the college environment (Wrona, 2016). In 2018, AFA released new competencies for the profession across 11 areas (AFA, 2018). These competency areas include “operating strategically, navigating complexity, student learning and student safety, and driving results” (AFA, 2018, p. 4). Despite

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the high expectations placed on fraternity/sorority professionals, they are often the lowest paid student affairs staff on campus (CUPA-HR, 2019; Jenkins, 2019). Additionally, campus-based fraternity/sorority professionals often do not have direct access to the highest level of student affairs leadership as the vast majority (approximately 80%) of fraternity/sorority advisors report to a director or to an Assistant VP (NASPA, 2014). Low pay, long hours, and lack of upward mobility lead to burnout among those who serve in these roles, and many choose to leave fraternity/sorority advising for other student affairs functional areas or other careers entirely (Jenkins, 2019; Koepsell & Stillman, 2016; Steiner, 2019). Despite these challenges and high rates of early career burnout, fraternity/sorority advisors are still choosing this career path.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Duffy and Dik's (2009) career development model was used to explore the spectrum of external influences that can affect the career decision-making process. This model identifies four external factors: *family expectations and needs*, *life circumstances*, *spiritual and religious factors*, and *social service motivation*. The first factor, *family expectations and needs*, can affect individuals at all stages of career decision making, particularly those from collectivist cultures where the family members may express a desired plan for a student's career. Family expectations can conflict with the internal needs and desires of individuals, yet families can also be supportive in choosing well-suited career paths (Duffy & Dik, 2009). In using this model to frame the current study, families can be very influential in students' decisions to pursue or dismiss fraternity/sorority involvement during their time in college. Additionally, a student who decides they want to pursue a career in student affairs or FSL may encounter resistance from family members who do not understand the field of fraternity/sorority advising, especially if family members

were previously vocal about the career path the student should pursue.

*Life circumstances* refers to uncontrollable events or situations that may influence or constrain career decision-making (Duffy & Dik, 2009). *Life circumstances* can be on a small or a large scale and can range from economic or market conditions to a family member's job loss. When these external events occur, they can shift an individual's career path for either the short or long term. *Life circumstances* can apply to fraternity/sorority involvement in a few ways. First, a student's experience within their fraternity/sorority chapter will likely influence the way they will conceptualize the value of fraternity/sorority involvement both during their experience as an undergraduate and after graduation. A positive undergraduate experience could lead to increased satisfaction and involvement within the chapter or pursuit of fraternity/sorority advising as a career. Conversely, a negative circumstance could lead to a student taking a leadership role or pursue fraternity/sorority advising as a career to create systemic change to address the issues or challenges they encountered as an undergraduate student.

*Spiritual and religious factors* refer to the level of one's spirituality. Duffy and Dik (2009) noted that religious beliefs could be viewed as externally determined or within one's will to control but in either case could have an effect on career decisions. Given that many fraternity/sorority organizations are founded upon religious principles, *spiritual or religious factors* could contribute to a student's fraternity/sorority experience or lead to further involvement as an undergraduate or alumni.

Finally, *social service motivation* captures an individual's desire to use their career as the primary purpose to better the world. Individuals who are motivated by this external factor likely pursue work they find meaningful and contribute to the common good (Duffy & Dik, 2009). The desire to help others is a frequent reason students

cite when joining fraternities and sororities, and the motivation to make an impact on the world could serve as a catalyst to pursue leadership positions or involvement within the fraternity/sorority community.

Duffy and Dik (2009) note that this list of external factors is not fully inclusive, though the model provides helpful context to frame the decision-making process for those who pursue fraternity/sorority advising as a career. This framework has not explicitly been used in student affairs research but has been used in industrial/organizational psychology and career development literature to examine career decision-making behavior of college students (Duffy & Sedlacek, 2010; Duffy, & Raque-Bogdan, 2010; Hunter et al., 2010). As is also noted in the examples given, each factor in this career development framework can also apply to the fraternity/sorority context and help understand the decision-making process for those who pursue a career in fraternity/sorority advising.

### Methodology

This study was conducted using narrative inquiry methodology to address the research question, How do fraternity/sorority professionals describe their decision to pursue a career in fraternity/sorority advising? Narrative inquiry centers participant stories and life experiences (Glesne, 2015). In narrative inquiry, the researcher conducts interviews with participants and focuses on cultivating a rich, thick description of a phenomenon, event, or experience related to the research question (Glesne, 2015). This methodology allows research participants to share stories and captures the career decision-making process. Using a constructivist approach, participants and the researcher interpret data together and attempt to understand experiences in order to develop and attribute meaning to them (Creswell, 2013).

I selected participants through snowball

sampling and convenience sampling (Creswell, 2013). These sampling methods facilitated use of my professional network as a former FSL advisor to identify participants who fit the criteria and also allowed other participants to identify those in their networks who might be willing to participate. I first shared a recruitment post in the NASPA Fraternity/Sorority Knowledge Community Facebook group and contacted those who indicated interest via email to share details about the study. There were 10 interested professionals who were contacted, and seven submitted the consent form and scheduled interview times.

All participants had between two and 12 years of experience in the field of fraternity/sorority advising with an average of six years of professional experience. All participants were initiated into a(n) inter/national fraternity or sorority as undergraduate students. There were four men and three women participants in the sample and they self-identified as white, Latinx, or Black. I intentionally chose campus-based professionals and inter/national headquarters staff members. Of the seven participants, two were employed by an inter/national organization at the time of the interview, though both had also previously worked as campus-based fraternity/sorority professionals. The sample included two participants who are members of historically white fraternities, two participants who are members of historically Black fraternities/sororities, one participant who is a member of a Latino-based fraternity, and two participants who are members of historically white sororities.

Interview questions were categorized into *experience as an undergraduate*, *career decisions and factors*, and *future goals and plans*. This structure of interviewing focused on each element of the participants' story individually, while also allowing participants to tell stories or expand on questions as necessary (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). I used a semi-structured interview protocol, and asked follow-up questions for participants to elaborate as they felt necessary.

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**Table 1**

*Description of Participants*

Name*	Gender-Identity	Fraternity/Sorority Affiliation	Years of Professional Experience in FSL	Type of Professional Role
Alicia	Woman	Historically white sorority	7	Headquarters
Andrew	Man	Historically white fraternity	4	Campus-based
Erica	Woman	Historically white sorority	10	Headquarters
Evan	Man	Historically Black fraternity	8	Campus-based
Grace	Woman	Historically Black sorority	6	Campus-based
Jason	Man	Latino-based fraternity	4	Campus-based
Matt	Man	Historically white fraternity	3	Campus-based

\* Names have been changed to pseudonyms.

Interviews via phone with participants ranged in length from approximately 45 to 60 minutes total and were recorded for transcription.

### **Data Analysis**

Data from each interview was transcribed verbatim, and pseudonyms were then assigned to names or information that would potentially allow a participant to be identified. Most participants chose their pseudonyms, and those who did not have a preferred pseudonym were assigned one. Transcripts were then coded, which is the process of organizing interview materials into smaller segments and assigning a phrase to capture the general meaning (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Using one transcript, codes were noted in the margins and then compared codes across other transcripts, noting additional codes that emerged through each transcript. I also used predetermined codes (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) based on Duffy and Dik's (2009) career development framework: *family expectations and needs, life circumstances, spiritual and religious factors, and social service motivation*. The final codebook included 51 total codes.

### **Positionality**

It is important to identify my identity as a fraternity/sorority professional, a member of an NPC sorority, and someone who has

served in both campus-based and headquarters professional roles in the context of this study. I am personally invested in the success of this field and have reflected on my own career journey frequently as a fraternity/sorority advisor. Additionally, I believe that my identity as an "insider" influenced the way participants interacted with me during their interviews. For example, participants did not often explain acronyms they used in their interview and it took further probing to ask participants to explain the inner workings of a campus or headquarters. The field of fraternity/sorority advising is also small and tight-knit, and I personally knew some of the participants outside of the context of this study. This pre-existing relationship could have affected how much participants shared with me during their interviews or how comfortable they felt with me as the researcher and could have resulted in more in-depth sharing or participants holding back during interviews.

### **Limitations**

A few limitations for this study exist. First, the nature of a qualitative study and narrative inquiry limits the ability for the study to be broadly generalized (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). More data is needed to truly generalize a sample for this research question, and replication of this study or more participants would allow for more

generalizable results. Second, the sample could have been more diverse to represent additional perspectives. There were no male-identified participants who worked for a(n) inter/national organization, and no participants were employed by a(n) inter/national fraternity at the time of the interviews. Intentionally including these perspectives would have made the study more robust. Further, I did not specifically address the role of spirituality in the decision-making process to pursue this career path. As spirituality is mentioned in the theoretical framework, I should have explicitly asked about this area during participant interviews.

### Findings

The purpose of this study was to explore how fraternity/sorority professionals describe their decision to pursue a career in fraternity/sorority advising. Since career decision-making is a process, results were divided into four stages to illustrate how participants described their journeys: (a) *finding their way*, (b) *the light bulb moment*, (c) *prioritizing fraternity/sorority roles*, and (d) *motivation to continue in the field*.

*Finding Their Way.* Each participant described the career path they thought they would pursue when they entered college. Some were decisive, like Alicia and Matt who knew they wanted to pursue the medical field as a nurse and a dentist respectively. Both Alicia and Matt note that their families were influential in the decision to initially pursue those career paths. Others, like Evan, were undecided: “I came in thinking that I was going to be a meteorologist, then I wanted to be a news anchor, then I wanted to be an architect, then I wanted to be an entrepreneur—that lasted for like three seconds.” For all participants, there was a specific time when they realized they were not enjoying what they were studying. This career crisis manifested differently for participants but was present throughout all of the interviews. Matt pursued dentistry, but realized he did not enjoy those classes as much as those in his minor:

So I realized that I needed to get out of [dentistry] and I was doing a minor in organizational leadership and I realized that I enjoyed going to those classes. I had fun with it and it fit my personality rather than being in a dental program, which allowed me to be in the library a lot or in the lab a lot and that was just not fun and enjoyable for me.

In another case, Andrew describes enjoying advertising as an undergraduate major, but his career led him in a different direction before pursuing graduate school in higher education:

I was going to be a copywriter for an advertising agency. That was my career path. I was an ad major from day one, and I never changed it. And liked my major a lot. And then, when I got out into the working world and hated it. It was just not for me. So, that’s when I decided to change. After I left the ad agency world, I decided that I wanted to go into education. I had a few friends who were teachers. And so, I got my certification to become a teacher and I did that for three years. While I loved the teaching aspects, I didn’t love all of the other things that went along with being a teacher, which made me kind of feel like a babysitter sometimes. So I started looking into grad programs with the idea that higher ed was something that I wanted to go into, and student affairs. I had some friends that had done other similar grad programs.

Andrew’s path to pursuing a graduate degree in higher education illustrates a non-linear process of career decision-making, but he eventually found his way to higher education and fraternity/sorority advising via K-12 education.

While deciding on a career path to pursue, participants were concurrently involved in their fraternity or sorority chapters as undergraduate members. All but one participant joined their organization before their junior year, and six of seven participants were immediately recruited to take on leadership roles in the chapter or

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the community (e.g., council board leadership, program board positions). Through these leadership roles, participants gained access to campus-based fraternity/sorority professionals or organizational headquarters staff. Through building relationships with these professionals in fraternity/sorority life, participants learn that student affairs and specifically fraternity/sorority advising can be a potential career path for them to pursue.

*The Light Bulb Moment.* Participants' distinct career crisis moments led to an exploration of alternative career paths. While working professionally in a different field, Jason volunteers with his fraternity, and notes: "I was more interested in doing the work of... preparing for regional meetings and the development of undergrads than I was at work." This sentiment was also described by Alicia, as she talked with fraternity/sorority life staff and realized that she might want to pursue this work through a different major:

I spent a lot of time talking to the staff and realized that I could do fraternity/sorority life, I could do higher education. But I wasn't fully sure that is what I wanted to do, so I switched to communications and organizational communication at the time, because it related to what I was doing outside of the classroom and what I enjoyed doing outside of the classroom. And then in my junior year is when I really started thinking, 'Oh okay- this is what I want to do, I think. I want to stay and work with college students.' It felt like something that was natural to me at the time. So I wanted to keep going at it, I guess.

The realizations of enjoying their leadership roles in fraternity/sorority advising lead Jason and Alicia to talk with their mentors and advisors. In their cases and those of other participants, these conversations encouraged them to pursue student affairs and fraternity/sorority advising as a career path.

All participants held at least one leadership

role within their fraternity/sorority community as undergraduate students, and many specifically noted the role of their advisors in encouraging them to pursue leadership experiences. Graduate assistants who worked closely with students also influenced their decisions, as Erica describes: "Kathryn (pseudonym) was younger and she had just come off traveling for her sorority before she started her grad program... she's actually the reason I applied to be a consultant for my sorority because she had traveled for hers."

When deciding not to pursue teaching, Evan describes a meeting with the Dean of Students at his undergraduate institution:

She walked me through [deciding that I didn't want to pursue teaching as a career] and I talked about involvement on campus and how I enjoyed my fraternity experience, and loved [student government], and programming. She said, 'Well, have you ever thought about pursuing a degree in higher education and working at a college or a university?' And, it's literally like, this light bulb just went off.

The "light bulb moment," as Evan describes, was common across participant stories. Participants seemed to remember a specific moment when they realized that they enjoyed the fraternity/sorority related work they were doing, and many had direct conversations with mentors and advisors about pursuing fraternity/sorority advising as a career. For many participants, advisors and mentors suggested a path to pursue fraternity/sorority advising, leading to their "light bulb moment."

*Prioritizing Fraternity/Sorority Roles.* During their searches for graduate schools, graduate assistantships, and eventually full time roles, participants described the prioritization they placed on working directly with fraternities and sororities. Various reasons ranged from, "it's just what I had been exposed to" (Erica), "I felt like, fraternity and sorority life was a calling of mine for whatever reason" (Evan), to "Truly I wanted to work in fraternity/sorority life, because of



the way fraternity and sorority was there for me” (Alicia). Jason had a similar experience and specifically described his desire to pursue work with culturally-based groups as a member of a Latino-based fraternity: “I think for me it was very much... Be the person who you needed.”

Six of seven participants in this study pursued a master’s degree in higher education or something closely related. Of these six participants, all describe searching for fraternity/sorority assistantships on their graduate school campuses, and some even selected their program based on the assistantship they were offered.

Despite prioritizing FSL roles, participants did not always have positive experiences during graduate school. Participants frequently discuss faculty and peer assumptions about fraternity/sorority advising, as Jason says, “And I remember in grad school not just my faculty but [peers and friends] saying, ‘Are you sure FSL is the path you want to take?’ Because there was and still is much to be desired [in terms of equity and inclusion] I think in taking on this type of work.” Participants describe faculty as having limited interest and/or knowledge of fraternity/sorority advising as a functional area of student affairs, and reinforcing negative stereotypes about fraternities and sororities through conversations in class. Matt explains:

We talked about, ‘Here’s how we help residential life.’ But we never referred to examples about fraternity/sorority life... unless it came to alcohol. But it was never a positive interaction of, ‘Here’s how we work with these students’ or anything like that. We were all just brought out for negative examples.

Alicia encountered supportive faculty and advisors, and those who did not understand FSL: Some of them didn’t really understand [FSL]. I had some faculty members like our history faculty member... He taught a dry topic and chose the spicy things to make it a little bit more lively. And so fraternity/sorority was one of those livelier topics.

But I wouldn’t say he did a good job of confronting the stereotypes in that... So I think it was a mix of supportive and then just ignorant.

It is interesting to consider the influence of peers and faculty in graduate school with regard to choosing FSL. Participants recalled negative perceptions of faculty related to FSL work, yet still chose to prioritize fraternity/sorority positions as they moved on from their graduate school experience.

*Motivation to Continue in the Field.* As participants reflect on their career paths and future plans, some feel motivated to stay in the field of FSL. Andrew shares that he has no plans to change his role and how he maintains his drive to continue:

I love the place that I work. I love the people I work with. I like what I currently do. I think that there is longevity in the position that I have. So, I have no intentions of going anywhere.... I still feel like every day is different, and every year is different, and every year brings new challenges.

Motivation manifests differently for Grace, who describes the potential of fraternity/sorority communities: “What motivates me most is just thinking through why people join fraternities and sororities, and how much advising, the right advising, the right program, the right community can completely change that [for the better].” Grace later explains that she pursued this career because “cared about the impact that Greeks can have on the larger community.”

The desire to give back as a professional in fraternity/sorority life was apparent throughout participant interviews. Participants believe that since they gained so much from their experience they should continue to support fraternity/sorority life through their career path. Others stay in this role to “create and sustain a bond with students” (Evan), “have the chance to help them move the needle” (Grace), “work with students to have a better experience, and to help

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change that culture” (Andrew). All participants talked about a common desire to give back and empower others to have a positive experience through fraternity/sorority membership.

Conversely, some participants share that they may pursue other options outside of the more traditional campus-based FSL path. Erica, who works for a sorority headquarters, shares,

I would like to be doing things that support the advancement of women. I don't know that I need to be doing that with a sorority but right now, that's what fits. And I want to be doing something that I'm good at and that can contribute something but does not envelop my whole identity.

When asked about his long-term career goals, Matt is concerned about the limited opportunities available to him without relocating:

You've caught me in a very interesting situation. I'm job searching for roles outside fraternity/sorority life. I really don't want to relocate. So, that minimizes my opportunities. The institutions that are around me that I could work at, they are another [FSL] office of one [professional]. So, um, but I'm not looking to change because I don't like fraternity/sorority life. I'm looking to change because the opportunities right now for fraternity/sorority life jobs are very entry level positions that just don't fit well with my credentials.

Matt went on to talk about how he is open to other positions in higher education that might pay more and be less stressful:

“...the academic advising job I'm applying for, get paid more for, not less responsibilities but less pressure of responsibilities of having to put on student organization events and things like that where it is more of a nine to five-ish job, where right now my life is not nine to five. And that's hard to have the stress level of dealing with hazing allegations or alcohol issues or sexual assault issues, but getting

paid bare minimum where others don't have those issues and they're getting paid more. So it's hard.”

Both Erica and Matt illustrate the complexity of job satisfaction and point out that decisions about career trajectories often can be made due to external factors. Both mention that their ideal position would be one where they maintain an identity outside of their jobs and have more control over potential stress factors and hours worked.

## Discussion & Implications

Findings from this study suggest that there is a fairly distinct path that individuals take when deciding to pursue fraternity/sorority advising as a career. There seems to be a point where undergraduate students begin to consider a different career path from the one they thought they would pursue and discover alternative options. Many talk with mentors and advisors as they process this decision and then become aware of student affairs and, more specifically, fraternity/sorority advising as a profession they might want to pursue. Graduate school then becomes an option for students to consider, and many prioritize fraternity/sorority advising roles in their search for assistantships. Finally, fraternity/sorority professionals consider how to advance in the profession and if there is a place for a personal identity and a work-related identity for them to keep simultaneously as they engage in this work.

The findings illustrate several aspects applicable to current fraternity/sorority professionals. First, it seems that being encouraged to take leadership roles by peers or advisors was very influential in participants' path to consider FSL as a career. In this sample, early leadership experiences were prominent, and being identified early in their fraternity/sorority experience was influential though that may not always be the case. Further, conversations with mentors and advisors about

career paths and the option of student affairs were also meaningful to participants. Fraternity/sorority professionals should openly have these conversations with student leaders early in their experience to uncover student affairs as a profession and to encourage students to consider fraternity/sorority advising as a career. It is evident that the relationships that fraternity/sorority professionals have with students matter significantly, and evidence of these mentoring relationships could help to support the need for additional fraternity/sorority advising staff to support a larger number of students entering the field.

A few participants pursued teaching majors initially in their college careers before deciding to pursue student affairs in graduate school. Colleges of Education could be a place to explain student affairs and recruit students who do not think that K-12 education is their ideal career. Academic advisors in education could also explore student affairs careers with students who are contemplating changing their major to something outside of education, or who do not seem satisfied with a career in K-12 education.

Many participants intentionally chose graduate programs that offered direct experience with fraternity/sorority programs. Professionals should help students navigate the graduate school and interview process and help students narrow functional areas they may want to pursue. If students are not able to gain primarily FSL experience through an assistantship, helping them to find opportunities to work with FSL in other ways might be helpful.

As mentioned in Duffy and Dik's (2009) framework, family input could influence the decision to join a fraternity/sorority and can also impact a student's choice of career path. Engaging with families early about the benefits and potential of fraternity/sorority involvement might help broaden the types of students who pursue fraternity/sorority membership and help families understand the experience that their student might have. Professionals can

also assist students to articulate the role of a fraternity/sorority advisor to families who may not understand student affairs or have direct experience with the field. This would be particularly helpful for students who have been heavily guided by their families to pursue a specific career path and now want to change their trajectory.

Balancing the desire to give back, or *social service motivation* as identified in Duffy and Dik's (2009) model, with the need to have separation from work responsibilities is necessary to retain professionals in fraternity/sorority advising. The concept of identity being solely work-based was mentioned by a number of participants and could lead to burnout. Nurturing the initial motivation that individuals had to pursue fraternity/sorority advising is crucial to retention. Participants mentioned work-related identity often in interviews, and most who work specifically in campus-based advising were unable to maintain a separate identity outside of work. Further, while there are a large number of entry-level roles in fraternity/sorority advising, the ability to advance in the field can be limiting, especially without relocating. Professionals with less than five years of experience may want to pursue a higher-level role in FSL, but the positions may not be available. This could explain why 57% of members in AFA had between zero and five years of professional experience (Koepsell & Stillman, 2016). Institutions should consider ways to increase the number of staff working with fraternity/sorority students on campuses, increase salaries for campus-based professionals specifically in front-line and student-facing roles, and provide appropriate benefits to retain professionals in these roles.

### Future Research

Future studies should continue to explore the decision to pursue fraternity/sorority advising as a career to examine if the trajectory is similar to the findings of this study. Participants' place

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of employment, prior work experiences, and fraternity/sorority affiliation would be helpful to consider in future studies to expand the sample. Future research could also explore how to measure aspects of career decision-making quantitatively, potentially considering specific experiences, majors, or skills that may lead students to pursue FSL as a career. Increased research on burnout and professional identity in FSL work is necessary to supplement this study and limited previous research (Steiner, 2019). Research in these areas should specifically examine ways to retain professionals in fraternity/sorority advising, specifically in campus-based and entry-level roles.

### **Conclusion**

This study adds to the body of literature focused on career decision-making of student affairs professionals and intentionally centers fraternity/sorority advising as a career choice. Decisions that individuals made were based on early exposure to leadership in their fraternity/sorority experience and explicit conversations about pursuit of fraternity/sorority advising with their advisors and mentors. As individuals took the next step to enroll in graduate programs, they prioritized fraternity/sorority advising roles to gain experience in the field and continued to prioritize FSL roles when searching for professional positions. Motivation and desire to give back to the experience as professionals also should be balanced with a need for outside identity to retain professionals in the field beyond five years. Finally, Senior Student Affairs Officers should consider these implications in further staffing FSL offices on campus, funding new positions, and providing appropriate compensation for the work of these professionals.

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