



NPHC: TIPS FOR ENSURING RELEVANCE

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Students, especially African Americans, initially joined fraternities and sororities to belong. There were political fights to be fought, struggles to overcome, and injustices to correct. Whether it was the turn of the century, the roaring 20s, or the post-civil rights era, National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC) organizations had a unique purpose and students were joining...and in astronomical numbers! Who wouldn't want to join such a revolution? Who wouldn't want to change lives in the community and on campus?

But, we used to be more transparent. Hazing was not yet an issue, our missions were clear, and our organizations were household names. Mom, dads, aunts, and uncles encouraged students to discover us when they got to campus. They told them to join when the opportunity arose. Collegiate members stood ready to return the call and happily brought in the newest generation of revolutionaries year after year.

What happened?
Where did it all go wrong?

We lost sight of our purpose. Many chapters became irrelevant. Other organizations and options existed. Moreover, we began to do things that had NOTHING to do with what it meant to be Greek.

Luckily, some students today still want to join. And, if chapters are willing to buckle down and refocus, they will once again lure quality students into their organizations.

Are We Still Relevant?

First things first...we recruit! Let's stop lying to ourselves. Sure, all the programs, wearing of letters, showing up at events, service projects, and so forth add to the social scene of campus. But, these types of actions and activities are also our way of letting people know we are here and what we are about. These activities may not be direct, in-your-face, "won't you join my organization?" recruiting, but they're still good recruitment tactics.

But, do we really matter? While student groups stress and overstretch themselves doing several programs a month, many can't help but wonder -what is it all for? What's the result? Are potential members attracted to these busy schedules and fancy shows? Do we really inspire others? Are we moving ordinary people to want to be extraordinary? How are we unique? If your chapter went away tomorrow, would anyone really care? While the relevance of NPHC fraternities and sororities was clear in the infancy of our organizations, today, in 2012, it's uncertain.

**How is your chapter considering these questions?
Have you discussed them?
How do the answers impact how you conduct Intake?**

Consider these five tips:

INTAKE TIP #1: DETERMINE THE WHY

Determine why your chapter is on campus and what it provides to potential members. Ask yourself, "how does my chapter inspire others?" Use those answers to guide the how and why of your intake.

Start with mentorship. People join people, not organizations. No longer can we ride the coattails of the organizations' legacies. Here's the reality: new college students know nothing about us.

First generation college students are becoming more prevalent. New students, especially first generation students, are likely to have no understanding of the difference between the blue and white or the pink and green. They will forget your calls and hand signs and couldn't care less about who came first or last. Initially, it's all irrelevant.

What actually matters is how your sorority or fraternity made them feel.

INTAKE TIP #2: EMBRACE MENTORSHIP

As the premier involvement option for students of color, it is important that we start with mentorship. We need to start by letting students know that NPHC organizations are the hub for support and relationships that will sustain students throughout their college years. They may or may not join, but remember this: the cornerstone of all of our groups is to elevate, help, and better our communities. Make friends, check-in on students, and form genuine connections. Your chapter should become synonymous with mentorship. You need to know the campus community you serve. When students attend your chapter's events, the conversations should not be basic; they should be advanced in nature because this is not the first interaction you have had with them. Mentorship does not happen overnight. It is a tedious process that enriches everyone involved. Imagine the possibilities! Active, consistent, and sustainable mentorship will yield the result you want for intake. Students will gravitate to groups that helped and shaped them in hopes of paying it forward.

INTAKE TIP #3: DETERMINE THE WHO

Get back to the basics. Who do we say we are?

Examine your values. Now look at your chapter's actions. Now, revert to your values...do they align? The more congruent your chapter is with its organizational values, the easier it will be to attract potential members to your chapter. Put your standards and values in front of you. Live them. You disappoint yourself and your chapter's founders when you ignore them.

How ridiculous does it appear when you say your chapter focuses on academics and philanthropy when in reality your GPA is lower than the school's average and your service is minimal? If the flyer for your next party or new member presentation is better than your advertisement for your bone marrow program, there may be a problem. We only attract what we appear to be. If your efforts are half-hearted and your values are abandoned, you will attract members with lackluster abilities and a skewed vision of what your chapter should be. Return to the 'what' and 'why' of your organization. The authenticity of your values and basic tenets will, alone, draw students who want to enhance their lives. Your chapter is a local franchise of a larger corporation. Adhere to its prescribed standards from the official logo to established programming. The consistency of our chapters makes us more visible to potential members.

INTAKE TIP #4: STOP DOING STUPID STUFF

Make sure your members are accurately displaying your organizational values. This ought to be easy since your fraternal values should align with your own personal values. Values congruence is a natural draw for people looking to affiliate!

We must stop the illegal, damaging, and destructive behavior that many of our chapters still engage in. You know that we are talking about: hazing, giving wood, late night sessions in basements and on rooftops, mental and emotional bullying, etc. There is no place for hazing in fraternity and sorority life.

Be honest! If you say you don't haze, don't haze! And, stop tolerating any [any] member who does.

Qualities like loyalty, commitment, and passion are advertised before you join and membership should only enhance that. We do not need to test the limits of potential members to assess their worthiness. The aforementioned mentoring and sharing of values should already tell you everything you need to know about a potential member. Imagine the number of members we miss because they are smart enough to avoid our recklessness. Imagine what we could accomplish if we stop trying to 'make people right'. Imagine what the lives of those who have died because of hazing could have been. We have injured and hurt people in the name of our organizations.

Organizations that claim to be of honor and the highest ideals should not debase themselves to the lowest behaviors. If we continue hazing in our community, all the other steps for improvement will not matter. Our organizations will continue to be mistrusted, drive away membership, and die an untimely, slow, painful, and public death.

INTAKE TIP #5: ADVERTISE

It's not a dirty word.

Making the decision to join a NPHC organization is a personal choice. With that said, gathering information should not be. Remember transparency? Being transparent also applies to how we tell others about the options to join our organizations. It's best for students to make well-educated selections. Hiding flyers, secretive meetings, and not being willing to talk about intake in a mature manner is counterproductive to building our membership. This is the era of the consumer. If I walk into Best Buy and tell the sales associate, "I have \$1,000, tell me about the best camera you have," and her response is "do your research," I'm leaving the store. The same applies to our organizations. Do not be afraid to share about your fraternity/sorority. You do not have to be a salesperson to share the joys of what makes your chapter special. A well-informed potential member will respect your organization and value what you share with them.

Stop hiding from your audience! Intake isn't a scavenger hunt. Make information readily available, advertise your interest meetings like you would any other program. Then, be ready to have meaningful conversations about your organization with potential members. Don't avoid talking about what the organization means to you, why you joined, and what you look for in members. Your openness to questions makes your chapter safer and open to those seeking to know more.

The recruitment and intake of new members is key to our longevity. There needs to be intentional, ongoing work and dedication to ensure our viability in the 21st century. Campus professionals, IHQ, and volunteers are ready to assist, but the most important work comes from within the chapter. The antiquated ways of recruiting are over. Step into the future, dream big, and provide the opportunity for future students to enjoy and embrace what it means to be a part of something bigger than themselves.