

INTRODUCING THE RESEARCH REPORT

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In this issue of Oracle, we introduce a new form of scholarship to the publication: The research report. The primary characteristic of a research report is its central purpose: To address a specific question about practice.

Research reports share some common characteristics of journal articles or book chapters. They contain the basic components of a traditional article such as an introduction with a purpose statement, research questions (which may or may not be explicit), a review of previous literature or relevant background information, and a report of findings. The findings may derive solely from the review of literature or may result from new empirical data or a study of archival data. Often, a research report does not have a methodology section or relegates those details to an appendix, largely because the audience is aimed more narrowly at decision-makers. While the most visible difference between a research report and a journal article may be the lack of an explicit and standardized format, both relate results in some way.

Depending on the audience, a research report may include discussion or implications, but this is not as customary as it is for journal articles. A key difference is that research reports are rarely peer-reviewed, as the purpose for a research report tends to be geared toward serving a more narrowly focused audience and advancing a broader, longer term research agenda. Further, peer-reviewed articles in most cases have a larger audience and wider distribution than research reports. By contrast, research reports serve more diverse actors within their audiences who are all focused on a narrower dilemma of practice. Author/s have flexibility in format, length, and style; format elements may be dictated by the organization. Further, a research report may be commissioned, sponsored, or simply requested by an organization and the degree of influence may influence the results.

So, why publish a research report in Oracle, a peer-reviewed journal? In its most recent Strategic Plan (2011-2013) the Association of Fraternity/Sorority Advisors articulated a commitment to research and development, articulated as expanding and validating the body of knowledge related to the fraternity/sorority experience. Many of the editorial board members have either served as campus professionals or have worked in some way with inter/national fraternity/sorority offices, organizing groups such as the National Panhellenic Conference, or advocacy groups such as HazingPrevention.Org. Each of these entities regularly produce research reports that serve a variety of immediate purposes-- from grade reports on to gauge the academic performance of campus organizations to annual risk management reports to consider the current status of risk and liability among all groups. The basic tenets of such activities classify their reports as applied research-- in some ways more important, at least to their intended audiences, than journal article authors working to advance a focused conversation about facets of the field through a much wider audience. Unfortunately, much of this invaluable research is read and filed because it is not reaching practice-oriented audiences in a readily applied format.

To truly “engage in and advocate for both academic and applied research related to the fraternity/sorority experience and advising profession” (AFA Strategic Goal #2), we believe it is important to distribute other equally valuable forms of research. We also believe Oracle is a venue where this research may find an advantageous home-- providing practitioners and scholars access to the breadth, depth, and diversity of findings produced by and for fraternal organizations. To that end, we invite all comers. We cannot stray entirely from the core focus of Oracle on sparking and cultivating peer-reviewed studies. Yet, we hope to provide a space for methodologically sound research that can be beneficial to the greater field. The publication process will require some copyediting and clarification, but we are committed to preserving the content. For example, in the report published for this issue, we requested the author provide two paragraphs of context and we did not publish the original transcripts from interviews. Otherwise, the report appears as it did when submitted to Fraternal Executives Association (FEA).

We hope in the coming issues you will find this periodic section insightful and consider information you might send us for review and possible inclusion.