LESSONS FROM TEAM SCIENCE

James P. Barber, Editor

As I write this letter, I'm in Wachapreague, on the Eastern Shore of Virginia, serving as a faculty coach for a research workshop focused on Team Science[1], a field that studies how to bring together scientists from different disciplines to solve complex problems. For three days, I have the pleasure of facilitating a group of graduate students from marine science, education, engineering, law, architecture, and geology (among others) and as they think about coastal resilience in this part of the world.

This may seem like a far cry from fraternity/sorority affairs, but I cannot stop thinking about the parallels to our field. The foundation of Team Science is an assumption that transdisciplinary teams, when trained to work together effectively, develop more innovative solutions to big problems than teams comprised of members from the same discipline. This is easier said than done, as working across disciplines requires learning new methodologies, new frameworks, and new language. Communication is paramount in creating these effective teams; without clear, jargon-free explanations, these diverse groups would struggle to share information and ideas.

We see some of the same patterns in working with fraternities and sororities. We need individuals from different "disciplines" to solve our most complex problems. Chapters that are highly successful have support from many stakeholders: parents, alums, faculty, headquarters staff, university administrators, and local community members. Often the representatives of these support groups cross boundaries of gender, race, and affiliation. Volunteers and advisors may not fit with the historical identities of the chapter.

However, often such diverse groups do not come together in support of a fraternity or sorority because they cannot communicate effectively. Some stakeholders may not want to let go of their old frameworks to envision new approaches to fraternity. Others may not understand what chapters expect from supporters because the language of fraternal organizations, steeped in Greek letters and acronyms is not welcoming to outsiders. Without clear communication across boundaries, broad coalitions to support and innovate fraternities and sororities never materialize.

The authors in this edition of Oracle offer several perspectives on the role of clear communication in working across boundaries in fraternity/sorority affairs. Zachary Taylor and Arianne McArdle examined over 47,000 posts from fraternity and sorority headquarters on the social media platform Twitter to learn about how and what national organizations communicate using Twitter. Lucas Schalewski, Jamie Utt, and Bryant Valencia strategized how to improve the quality of survey data on fraternity men by screening out those who don't communicate truthfully on survey instruments. S. Brian Joyce examined how Whiteness is communicated and perpetuated in fraternity systems through the recruitment process. Finally, Keith Tingley, Loni Crumb, Shelly Hoover-Plonk, Wes Hill, and Crystal R. Chambers assessed undergraduates' attitudes about initiation and hazing practices, and identified a lack of clarity between those terms among some demographics.

Take in the findings from these studies and consider how communication plays a role in the teams you create in fraternity/sorority life. Changing the way we communicate may enable us to build more effective, more diverse teams to address the complex problems of the fraternal movement.

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[1] For more on Team Science, see *Enhancing the Effectiveness of Team Science*, edited by Nancy J. Cooke and Margaret L. Hilton, https://doi.org/10.17226/19007