

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR
JAMES P. BARBER, EDITOR | OCTOBER 13, 2020

Greetings from Williamsburg, Virginia. As I reflect on the time that has passed since our last issue was released, it is hard to comprehend just how much our world has changed. We are seven months into the COVID-19 global pandemic that has fundamentally altered daily life. Social unrest and racial reckoning sparked by the murders of unarmed Black people, including Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, and too many others, fuel protests, activism, and conversation across the country. And we are just days away from a presidential election that is expected to be controversial and may be without a clear outcome on election night.

Each of these events have influenced the ways that fraternities and sororities operate. Organizations with core values centered on building community and bringing people together are mandated to meet virtually on many campuses due to concerns about the pandemic. Fraternity and sorority houses across the country are under quarantine due to outbreaks of COVID-19. Movements such as “Abolish Greek Life” seek to convince fraternity and sorority members to renounce their membership and disband in response to egregious offences of sexual violence, racism, and hazing. The economic downturn brought on by the pandemic threatens higher education institutions as well as fraternal organizations as financial resources tighten.

Many of these circumstances related to the pandemic were unimaginable just a year ago as we prepared to meet in Anaheim for the AFA Annual Meeting. Yet other elements of our current environment related to racial discrimination are not surprising, the product of over 400 years of oppression. This current moment also prompts reflection on the origins and evolution of the fraternity and sorority community. As I teach students in my first-year seminar course, *Virtue and Vice: Fraternities, Sororities, and the American University*, Greek-letter organizations were founded on exclusion and discrimination based on sex, race, and religion. Although many of the statutory restrictions on membership have been removed in recent decades, the legacy of exclusion lives on in wealth, resource, and membership disparities between organizations on most campuses today. The ways in which our governing bodies are organized detail the lines along which fraternities and sororities historically divided students.

How do we reconcile the harmful aspects of fraternity and sorority with the positive elements of personal development, lifelong relationships, and academic support that are also a part of the complicated legacy of fraternal organizations in the United States? We must acknowledge the complexity. Research can help us to document, examine and critique the experience of fraternity and sorority, and ideally prompt positive change in fraternity/sorority communities.

Two research articles are featured in this issue of *Oracle*, and they illustrate this aim of documenting, examining, and critiquing the experience to reveal complexity. The first is a quantitative study by Ronald Yates that explores the ways that the addition of a fraternity/sorority community can influence student and institutional success. The second article is a qualitative study by Crystal Garcia and Antonio Duran examines the dynamics around gender and sexuality in Latinx/a/o-based co-ed fraternities. Student participants shared how they most often felt exclusion from their organizations, despite an occasional sense of belonging.

These studies exemplify the effects that fraternal organizations have on the college experience at both broad institutional and profoundly individual levels. Enjoy reading these two works of scholarship; I trust you will find they add to our understanding of the complexity of the fraternity and sorority experience.

In closing, I want to acknowledge some important transitions on the *Oracle* Editorial Team. As I

shared in my letter last issue, Dr. DJ Mitchell has completed his term as Associate Editor. With this issue, we welcome Dr. Adam McCready as Associate Editor, Kahlin McKeown as Assistant Editor, and Dr. Kate Steiner moves to Associate Editor after three years of service as Assistant Editor. David Harger and T.J. Horan join us as Editorial Assistants this year. Lastly, this marks the final issue for Johann Ducharme after nearly three years as Editorial Assistant. Best wishes to Johann as he works to complete his dissertation study this year. Thanks to you all for your dedication to *Oracle*; I appreciate your work, intellect, and fellowship.

Stay well and take care in these uncertain times.