

**BOOK REVIEW: PIETRO A. SASSO, J. PATRICK BIDDIX, & MÓNICA LEE MIRANDA. (2020).
*SUPPORTING FRATERNITIES AND SORORITIES IN THE CONTEMPORARY ERA: ADVANCEMENTS IN
PRACTICE*. MYERS EDUCATION PRESS.**

REVIEWED BY SHANTÉ C. HEARST & KEVIN J. BAZNER

Anyone serving as a campus-based fraternity/sorority advisor can attest to the complexity of navigating roles as advocate, advisor, change agent, and more. Further, the storied histories and contemporary challenges facing fraternity/sorority life (FSL) and higher education professionals is increasingly demanding. The authors of *Supporting Fraternities and Sororities in the Contemporary Era: Advancements in Practice* present a much-needed updated reference text examining the multiple facets FSL and other higher education professionals must be attuned to in supporting students involved in FSL organizations. Appropriately, the editors acknowledge FSL is filled with contradictions fostering positive and negative opportunities for student development (Sasso et al., 2020). This text brings together a group of researchers and scholar-practitioners making this text an excellent reference for graduate preparation programs, professional development, and the budding researcher interested in FSL issues. Additionally, this text offers some examination of areas underserved by much of the published literature on FSL (e.g. Latino/a organizations, historically Native American fraternities & sororities, and issues related to diversity & inclusion).

The book is divided into five parts: (1) Challenges, (2) Chapter Advising, (3) Programming Issues, (4) Diversity and Inclusion, and (5) National Organizations. Appropriately, the editors begin with some of the contemporary challenges facing FSL. Chapter One centers the importance of holistic new member education and ongoing concerns associated with academics, belonging, and alcohol. Gregory

Parks and Sarah Spangenburg provide a welcomed legal orientation to liability and risk management issues within FSL. Their attention to *legalese* is complemented with specific examples and descriptions of issues FSL professionals and researchers should be examining. Chapter Three discusses the challenges associated with mental and emotional health with some updated research statistics and practical ways to support members. Similarly, in Chapter Four, Aaron Hughey examines substance abuse issues among FSL members.

Part Two offers some consideration to chapter advising. Wendi Kinney and Allison Swick-Duttine offer their practical experience advising local organizations in Chapter Five. Two former presidents of the Association of Fraternity/Sorority Advisors provide an updated examination of the varying roles and constituencies the campus professionals navigate in Chapter Six. Workman and Ballinger present in Chapter Seven some original research on the perceptions of the effectiveness of chapter consultant visits with suggestions to improve current practice. Chapter Eight proposes a comprehensive approach to prevent whole community suspensions and reimagine what it means to be a “community” on the contemporary campus.

Part Three focuses on the emerging tensions about long-term viability of the fraternal movement such as community-wide bans, and the pressures for FSL programs to “fix” all the issues associated with the fraternity/sorority experience. Chapter Nine discusses issues associated with leadership development and challenges the need for more complex and critical approaches to student development.

In Chapter Ten, Parish and Carr provide some theoretical guidance and practical suggestions for service and philanthropy engagement. Bureau and Barber present some compelling evidence about standards programs not living up to their intended outcomes and offer their assessment expertise to practitioners to be more intentional.

Part Four provides three chapters related to diversity and inclusion on topics of gender and sexuality, gender performativity, and social belonging for students of color in predominantly white organizations. Collectively, these chapters blend current research, updated considerations for practice, and offer some considerations for expanding these lines of research inquiry.

Finally, Part Five presents a discussion on the historical development and current progression of historically marginalized national organizations such as Latino/a Fraternities and Sororities, Historically Native American Fraternities and Sororities (HNAFS), National Multicultural Greek Council (NMGC), National Asian Pacific Islander Desi American Panhellenic Association (NAPA), National Pan-Hellenic Council, as well as updates to current progression of the North American Interfraternity Conference, National Panhellenic Conference, and Association of Fraternity/Sorority Advisors.

Overall, the text takes on an appreciable job of discussing significant topics related to FSL. Given the average tenure of professionals in the FSL field is less than five years (Goodman & McKeown, 2020), the text paints a broad picture of FSL while capturing a variety of topics that must be tended to in ways even a seasoned professional would need a refresher on. Given the acknowledged contradictions and complexity of advising FSL organizations, the text could have paid more attention to the realities many campus professionals navigate as an “office-of-one” and juggling the complex political campus environments many younger professionals are under-

equipped to handle (Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008). Specifically, the text could pay more attention to addressing the pervasive role of institutional politics and the multiple demands placed on FSL professionals to serve the multiple roles as advocate, advisor, and change agent.

The inclusion of chapters on LGBTQ+, National Association of Latino Fraternity Organizations (NALFO), HNAFS, NMGC, and NAPA highlights a missing conversation often underexplored or seemingly taboo within FSL spaces. The editors do well in recognizing the lack of research of and among culturally-based organizations, and students of color engaging in FSL overall. Particularly, the text fills a gap in giving attention to conversations around diversity, equity, inclusion, and attention to culturally-based groups within professional development and graduate training. However, the largest critique of the book may rest in addressing the contradictions that lay within FSL.

Given the editors’ acknowledgement of contradictions in their preface and a glaring conversation among many FSL professionals, additional attention could have been paid to some of the tension between the topics addressed in the text and how fraternities and sororities can reconcile some of these contradictions. More work is certainly needed to highlight and critique these contradictions and demonstrates a need for additional research. However, the text does a quality job of illuminating how FSL is not simply a functional area that provides an outlet for campus involvement, but a complex arena providing development, strategic support, and the power to facilitate students’ holistic development through co-curricular learning as a high-impact practice (Kuh, 2008).

Overall, the text presents a good overview of existing research, an overview of major components that exist within FSL, and the inclusion of topical areas not widely discussed in other FSL publications. This book brings together a blend of

researcher and scholar-practitioner lenses that enhance the current examination of fraternities and sororities, and toward the implementation of improved practice and considerations for future research. The text would make an excellent complement to graduate preparation programs about the FSL function areas, the budding researcher interest in exploring fraternity/sorority related topical areas, or for the seasoned professional in need of a refreshing update to the complexities of their role.

References

- Goodman, M. A. & McKeown, K. (2020). *The Association of Fraternity/Sorority Advisors membership report: AFA in 2020*. The Association of Fraternity/Sorority Advisors.
- Kuh, G. D. (2008). Excerpt from high-impact educational practices: What they are, who has access to them, and why they matter. *Association of American Colleges and Universities*, 14(3), 28-29.
- Sasso, P. A., Biddix, J. P., & Miranda, M. L. (Eds.). (2020). *Supporting fraternities and sororities in the contemporary era: Advancements in practice*. Meyers Education Press.

Biographies

Shanté C. Hearst is a doctoral student of higher education administration and the interim director for fraternity and sorority life at Texas A&M University. She earned her M.A. in educational administration from the University of the Pacific. Her research interests surround the experiences of Black women in higher education, as well as fraternity and sorority life. She is a proud and active member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc.

Dr. Kevin J. Bazner, Jr. is an assistant professor of educational leadership at Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi. His research and teaching focuses on illuminating experiences of minoritized student affairs administrators serving in mid-level positions and the socialization of new professionals in higher education administration. He is a member of Phi Delta Theta Fraternity.