

LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

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ADAM M. MCCREADY, PH.D.

JAMES P. BARBER, PH.D.

This special issue of *Oracle*, “Fraternity and Sorority Life During 2020”, in many ways exemplifies aspects of the events of 2020 and their effects on fraternities and sororities. We, as the Editor (Adam) and immediate past Editor (James) of *Oracle*, thought it would be valuable to reflect on the unique journey to create this special issue, from conceptualization to publication, as well as, address the scholars’ contributions to the literature. A traditional editor’s letter seemed inadequate, and we have elected to rely on a dialogue for this editors’ letter.

Comment from James P. Barber

The motivation to create a special issue was in part to acknowledge and document the distinct historical moment we were in leading up to the start of the 2020 - 2021 academic year. The Editorial Board first began conversations about a special issue in Summer 2020 as COVID-19 lockdowns were in effect. Fraternities and sororities, social organizations by nature, were unable to gather in person for meetings or events and there was concern in the field about whether and how organizations could survive if membership were severely impacted by the pandemic.

At the same time, the murders of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and George Floyd, among others, caused many in the nation to (re)consider race in the United States. Racial justice protests took place across the U.S. and around the world. Fraternities and sororities, many of which were founded with strict exclusions based on race, gender, and/or faith, were also at a moment of reckoning and reflection on their past.

We solidified our plans during the fall, and launched a call for manuscripts in early 2021. We advertised plans for a special issue that would feature articles on the theme of “Fraternity/ Sorority Life During 2020.” Suggested topics included COVID-19, quarantine, Black Lives Matter and social justice movements, our pivot to online learning, the Abolish Greek Life movement, virtual fraternity/sorority life experience (including recruitment/intake), and innovations in practice during the pandemic.

Abstracts were due in Spring 2021 and the Oracle Editorial Board selected several for inclusion in the special issue. We asked those authors to proceed with full manuscripts that would then be submitted and reviewed through our usual double-blind peer review process. In this way, the Editorial Board gave the green light to article concepts, but the actual manuscripts were still vetted through peer review once completed.

Comments from Adam M. McCready

The 2021 Editorial Board received the initial versions of the manuscripts in the Summer 2021. Like many other things, our peer review process took longer than anticipated during the pandemic as authors, peer reviewers and Editorial Board members navigated increasingly more complicated personal and professional circumstances. We aimed to value the humanity of everyone involved, and offered grace when needed. With the transition in leadership in January 2022, the present Editorial Board assumed responsibility for stewarding the special issue to publication. The result of the combined effort of everyone involved is the three studies that you find in this special issue.

Though not our intent, the three empirical research articles in the special issue examined or explored how the COVID-19 pandemic affected sorority and fraternity constituents. Two, “Comparing the Effects of COVID-19 on Fraternity & Sorority Members and Unaffiliated College Students” and “The Edge of Extinction: The COVID-19 Lived Experience of National Pan-Hellenic Council Fraternity Presidents” by Claude E. P. Mayo, Alade S. McKim and Ebonee R. Mayo-Mitchel, identify challenges faced by sorority and fraternity members during the pandemic. In particular, both studies illuminate the adverse effects of the pandemic on the experiences of members of National Pan-Hellenic Council and other culturally-based sororities and fraternities. The other study, “Fraternity/Sorority Organizational Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic” by Gary Ballinger and Jamie L. Workman, investigated how service delivery and organizational structure of inter/national fraternity and sorority professionals and volunteers were affected by the pandemic. In sum, these studies make it clear that sorority and fraternity life did not operate as “business as usual” during the pandemic, and the altered context affected the experiences of undergraduate members.

We are excited to share these articles with you. We hope this scholarship not only documents the unique historical moment of sorority and fraternity life in 2020, but will shape practice, policy and research moving forward related to fraternities and sororities.