



EDITORIAL

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As the first 2025 issue of the *Journal of Sorority and Fraternity Life Research and Practice*, I feel the urgency to address the state of U.S. society and higher education as a subset of our society. It has been about nine months since Donald Trump took office and, for those who follow higher education news, it is painfully obvious that colleges and universities have been a clear target of this presidential administration. In less than a year, the administration has taken multiple actions to mold higher education into the system they want it to be—one underscored by control and censorship. These actions include regularly threatening to withhold federal funding from colleges and universities that do not dismantle civil rights initiatives and protections offered through diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts; targeting international students, staff, and faculty that speak on issues they do not agree with; and censoring research and speech via a list of banned words. The threats to colleges and universities, actions I believe constitute blatant coercion, have become normalized in the sense that educators have come to expect them. The words diversity, equity, and inclusion have been so vilified that we are seeing institutions of higher education erase websites, resources, and the existence of student support services not because they are ineffective in serving students, but out of fear that institutional federal funding will be withheld by Donald Trump. My home institution is one such example.

Adding to this context, as of August, Trump's administration has cancelled over 6,000 international student visas, approximately four times the number of visas cancelled by the same time in the previous year (Hansler & Atwood, 2025) including the visa for Tufts University student, Rumeysa Ozturk for her pro-Palestinian stance. I mention Rumeysa as her case was among those exceptionally troubling. She was abducted near her off-campus apartment by masked immigration officials wearing plain clothes into an unmarked vehicle and taken into a detention center (Pérez, 2025). As someone who studies higher education and sorority and fraternity life, Rumeysa's story was alarming as it exemplified a threat to free speech in the United States—particularly as the administration recently added social media reviews to the visa process—and raised flags regarding the way she was taken. Sexual assault and physical violence are already major issues on college and university campuses. Permitting the taking of individuals by masked people with no identifying clothing into unmarked vehicles could very well open more opportunities for these acts of violence to take place in and around our campus spaces.

Given the current political context, we are living in a time in which censorship is prevalent. The remarkable thing about this censorship is that it is coming directly from our federal government. Look, for

instance, at the list of over 350 words in federal websites, documents, and research funding to be banned or flagged for review (Connelly, 2025). Even further, as a researcher and editor of a journal, it was horrifying to see demands earlier this year for the erasure of federal research data and even publication manuscripts that mentioned topics including transgender people, gender, and climate among other subjects (Santarsiero, 2025; Sherman & Glena, 2025; Wang, 2025). It was frightening to hear the panic from researchers across the country scrambling to back up data and publications to ensure that information and knowledge would not be lost indefinitely. Witnessing this phenomenon made me realize how fragile our Democracy is and led me to reflect on how research and knowledge is a powerful asset. It would not be a target if it did not matter.

So much has taken place this year leading up to the release of this issue. As I considered what to write in this editorial, I thought about who research and scholarly writing is for and what it is intended to do. There is currently a strong attempt to silence college and university communities, but we do not have to allow coercion and threats to diminish our values and our existence. Scholarship can provide new insights, innovations, ways of thinking and being, and possibilities for how we carry out our work. In the context of sororities and fraternities it can offer new perspectives on how we view our siblinghoods, who we are as organizations, and how we support the members of our organizations. The articles in this issue serve that purpose. They unpack topics including organizational conformity, fitting in, perceptions of bodies, conceptions of masculinity, and the significance of race in the college experience. Together, these articles help readers better understand the sorority and fraternity experience as well as ways our communities can better serve their members.

I am sometimes asked why I continue to advocate for sororities and fraternities despite some of their downfalls. The truth is I believe in these organizations. I believe they have the power to incite change within college campuses; they have done it before and can do it again.

Consider for instance the fact that women's organizations emerged in a time when women were largely excluded from higher education and fraternity life. Or perhaps the fact that culturally based sororities and fraternities emerged in response to explicit and implicit exclusion from society as a whole and from sorority and fraternity life. This moment in history is calling for leadership that is authentic, human centered, and solidifies the potential for true bonds of siblinghood. Research, including the articles in this issue, can be a powerful guide in that process – people in positions of power would not try to censor it if that were not true.

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