



JOSHUA WELCH

Director of Greek Life | University of Georgia

Candidate, AFA President

The fraternity and sorority profession (and higher education in general) is a complex, interdisciplinary space with many key stakeholders. What do you see as the greatest opportunities to build stakeholder alignment and consensus over the next five years? How would you effectively lead the association through this exercise in alignment?

AFA must navigate diverse interests, values, and priorities to build stakeholder alignment and consensus within the fraternity and sorority profession and the broader higher education landscape. This will involve promoting a shared vision of inclusion and equity, enhancing communication and transparency, creating opportunities for cross-functional collaboration, and cultivating purpose-driven relationships with professional associations, vendors, organizations, and institutions. Key initiatives include fostering belonging through affinity spaces, inviting member feedback to enhance transparency in decision-making, organizing cross-functional teams for critical initiatives, and translating the work of fraternity and sorority advising throughout higher education to identify opportunities for strategic collaboration that benefit our members and the broader community. The association's strategic plan, Forward to 50, provides clear objectives to accomplishing much of this work. As a leader within the association, I would continue to practice purposeful leadership to ensure we fulfill the priorities and objectives of the strategic plan. I would also utilize adaptive leadership strategies to respond to changes in the landscape that require agile responses. Facilitating this alignment and consensus will require collaboration and change for the association; I will aim to clearly communicate the reasons for such change and provide support to stakeholders through transitions.

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President Candidate

Describe your understanding of the role of the board of directors (BOD). What strengths or characteristics do you possess that would make you an effective BOD member? How, specifically, have you demonstrated this?

The role of the board of directors is to embody the Association's work and serve as conveners themselves. Board members should be engaging and work to pull members of the Association into the work necessary to move it forward. As a directional body, the board works with staff to assess progress toward the Association's strategic priorities, strategic positioning, scholarly engagement, competency building, and member engagement. As a relational leader, I would contribute to the success of the BOD by listening to the membership and the staff and using those perspectives with my fellow board members to put them into action. Over the past two years as a member of the Board of Directors, I've sought opportunities to engage AFA members at all levels and in multiple spaces to understand their needs and how they perceive AFA to be addressing them. I have worked closely with staff and volunteers to identify the Association's resources that can be employed to respond to the membership's needs. I've also worked with staff and volunteers to arrange the association's resources and partnerships to maximize their impact to benefit our members.

Describe any salient identities you hold, both professionally and personally, and how they may frame your perspective as a member of the board of directors.

I identify myself professionally as an educator, I use the fraternity and sorority experience to provide educational opportunities to students to help them develop skills outside of the classroom. I am someone who has worked to position myself in my various roles as a content expert and to be involved in the advancement and advocacy of the fraternity and sorority experience on campuses. This mindset also helped to inform my role as a member of the AFA Board of Directors and the professional development committee, where I have worked to align resources and services of the Association to impact the competencies of our membership directly. My experience as both a headquarters staff member and a campus-based professional is also important to me because I saw the Association through those different lenses and noticed that the perceived value of the Association changed depending on which side of the table I was on. These identities will frame my work as a member of the BOD because they have lenses associated with them that I will use to consider the decisions the BOD faces and how the outcome of those decisions will best position the Association and the members we serve. I will also continue to advocate for educational opportunities for members to develop the skills and competencies to position themselves as subject matter experts and find their voices on their respective campuses and within their organizations.

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AFA at its core is a professional development association, and has continued to invest in and enhance our professional core competencies. How can AFA best facilitate the development of necessary knowledge and skills for those doing the work of the fraternity/sorority profession, and how do you see that work needing to evolve?

I was very excited about the revised AFA Core Competencies when they were announced because I feel like they encompassed the work of fraternity/sorority professionals more than ever before—understanding that there must be foundational knowledge in the profession that is then used to further professionals in their roles and development of the professional skills. While I believe that the core competencies in their entirety are important, I think that in the current environment we find ourselves in, fraternity and sorority professionals **MUST** possess skills in the understanding and application of strategies to address student safety and not solely safety through a risk management approach but through a lens of safety in regards to wellness and wellbeing, inclusive of mental health and diversity, equity, and inclusion. I think that it is also essential for fraternity and sorority professionals to have the capacity to navigate complexity. The environment in which our organizations and institutions operate has been and will continue to be complex. Professionals who have shown partners and their supervisors that they can navigate these complex situations and offer viable, sound, and supported decisions can position themselves within their organization/institution as a subject matter expert and someone who should be empowered to make decisions.

One of the main responsibilities of board members is to maintain financial accountability of the organization. Board members act as trustees of the organization's assets and must exercise due diligence to oversee that the organization is well-managed and that its financial situation remains sound. Please describe a time when you have had to make difficult financial and/or resource allocation decisions and how would you use that experience as you serve on the board.

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AFA's strategic plan, 'Forward to 50', will be the 'north star' for the Association's efforts over the 2025 and 2026 years. Discuss how you typically approach prioritization and allocation of strategic planning efforts, and what you see as the Board of Directors' role in strategic plan execution.

I believe the prioritization and allocation of strategic planning efforts requires a systematic and thoughtful process to ensure that resources are used effectively and objectives are achieved. While the AFA Strategic Plan can serve as the 'North Star,' the association will still need to navigate the terrain and landscape of higher education as we follow it. To do this effectively, the 2025 and 2026 Board of Directors will need to analyze the plan's objectives to understand their potential impact on the Association related to member needs, external trends, and resource availability. A part of that analysis of objectives will be to identify and prioritize initiatives that can be realistically supported with current resources or those that have the potential to attract additional funding and support. As a dynamic organization with a mix of staff and volunteer support to accomplish the objectives of our plan, the board must help establish clear metrics and accountability by tracking progress through regular reviews and reports from the Executive Director and staff. Finally, the board must be adept in project management and identifying points where pivoting or reallocating resources may be necessary. As a board member, I would do these things and work to engage stakeholders in our execution to communicate our progress and garner support. I would also work to inspire confidence and support for the plan through clear communication and advocacy for what it means to our members.

The AFA President serves as our board chair and works with our Executive Director to shepherd our board through critical decisions impacting the future of AFA. How would you lead our board of directors through those decisions, and how would you ensure the directors remain focused on the right questions?

To be an effective board chair, I would employ a comprehensive approach in the boardroom. The steps I would take to facilitate effective board meetings include: Understand Board Members' Perspectives: I would work to gain insight into fellow board members' backgrounds and viewpoints to appreciate their decision-making processes. This would help me tailor discussions and foster inclusivity while also building rapport to refocus conversations professionally and respectfully. Facilitate Informed Discussions: Ensure board members are well-prepared by encouraging pre-meeting preparation, providing contextual briefings, and creating structured agendas that prioritize key issues and guide discussions effectively. Promote Systematic Decision-Making: Encourage the use of decision-making frameworks to ensure decisions are systematic, informed, and focused on forming appropriate and actionable questions. Provide opportunities for continuous education and development: Using continuing education and development opportunities such as the Above Board Training provided by PLAID and bringing in experts to help board members stay informed on developments allows for board members to continuously improve their capacity to engage at high levels. These strategies and working closely with the Executive Director of AFA would allow me to foster a collaborative and forward-thinking environment to support the execution of AFA's mission and strategic priorities.

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President Candidate

The labor of the AFA President goes above and beyond that of an at-large Board member, including but not limited to general Board management and accountability, executive supervision and collaboration, and public involvement in the sorority/fraternity industry. How would you approach managing and prioritizing multiple demands on your time in the Presidential role?

To be effective in the role and manage multiple demands on my time, I would work to employ the following strategies: Establish clear priorities and goals for my term in office. I want to focus my efforts on key priorities and goals that align with AFA's strategic plan, collaborate with the AFA Foundation and its chair, and help advance the association's work through relationship building and strategic positioning. Develop a structured schedule to balance the existing responsibilities of my professional and personal roles with the additional responsibilities of AFA. This would help me allocate blocks of time for responsibilities such as board management, meeting preparation, and strategic planning with the Executive Director. Delegate Effectively— I would work to empower board members to advance the work through standing committees like the finance committee, personnel committee, governance and nominations committee, and short-term opportunities like the audit committee. This would help distribute the workload, foster a sense of shared responsibility, and develop future board chairs. This also includes appropriate leverage of staff expertise to manage and operationalize board decisions. Maintain open and effective communication - use regular check-ins to discuss progress, address challenges, and recalibrate priorities as needed.