



MARILYN RUSSELL

Executive Director of Campus Involvement
The University of Texas at Austin

Candidate, AFA Board of Directors

Please concisely outline your professional volunteer experience (most recent position first) and any other volunteer experience, both within and outside of the association, that is directly related to association management, board service, or the position for which you are accepting a nomination. Be sure to include both the position held and dates of service.

- Association of Fraternity and Sorority Advisors (AFA), Member, 2007 - Present
 - Presentation Faculty, 2014, 2015, 2017, 2019, 2024; First 90 Days Mentor, 2011-2012
 - Graduate Staff Selection Committee, 2011-2012; Nominations and Election Committee, 2019-2020
- National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA), Member, 2009-Present
 - Conference Faculty, 2020-2021; Middle Managers Institute Graduate, 2017
- Zeta Tau Alpha Fraternity, 1997 - Present
 - National Officer Positions; Traveling Leadership Consultant, 23 Unique Campus Visits, 2001 - 2002; Harm Reduction Mentor and Rotational Facilitator, 2017 - Present; Director of New Chapters, The University of Texas at San Antonio, 2009 - 2014; Director of New Chapters, Colorado State University, 2007-2009
- Local Involvement Various Board Positions in San Diego, CA and Austin, TX, 2005-2019
- National Panhellenic Conference Area Advisor, 2018 - 2020, 2024-2026
- North American Interfraternity Conference Awards Judge, 2024-2025

Describe your understanding of the roles and responsibilities of the AFA 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 AFA Board of Directors engages in the labor of governance, keeps focus of the AFA mission, collaborates on and keeps sight on the strategic plan, guides on budget and financial responsibilities, supports executive staff, contributes time, talents and gifts to all layers of the organization, and builds and leverages skills and relationships to support the forward momentum of the association. I bring a blend of analytical and strategic thinking, collaborative and communicative leadership, a level of adaptability that has allowed a long career, a deep commitment to values-based student development and to all we achieve through fraternity and sorority. I have a strong track record of navigating complexity, balancing competing priorities, and building consensus across stakeholder groups. I am particularly skilled at turning vision into actionable plans while maintaining a focus on the human experience in our work. One example is the conduct communication protocol I developed with our campus conduct team. We created a shared process for engaging SFL chapters, advisors, and headquarters, emphasizing transparency, mutual respect, and timely updates. Once all

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staff were trained on this new process, it led to an immediate shift in trust in how our teams collaborate and support students, how we best work with organizations to support long term cultural change in our communities and become a model for accountability without judgment.

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?

One of our greatest opportunities for stakeholder alignment lies in framing our shared commitment to student learning, safety, and belonging as the foundation for collaboration. I have built my career on creating and maintaining relationships that support meaningful progress-prioritizing alignment and finding consensus is not just important to me, it is essential. To build consensus, we must move from transactional communication to transformational dialogue which centers transparency, listening, elevating marginalized voices, and finding common ground rooted in the student impact. My approach would involve facilitating focus groups, both within and across stakeholder types, to surface shared values and inform strategic direction. Alignment does not have to mean uniformity; it can mean shared ownership, where each contributor knows their role and feels invested. As an example, I founded and chaired a cross-functional committee that launched a shared framework for prevention and safety. We defined three simple, clear principles and invited partners to share them broadly in their own way. The result was a widely understood, consistently applied model that created alignment without rigidity which allowed for learning in context and increased the baseline awareness while also making a long-term impact. Taking what we learn from the focus groups and other known data could support a similar process that could simplify messaging and allow the good work to permeate the profession.

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.

In my roles, I have served as the primary budget manager for programmatic efforts and paraprofessional staffing. Nearly every year in a director-level role, I have participated in budget reduction exercises, evaluating what could stay, what could go, and how to meet growing needs with fewer resources. In some years, this was a reflective tool to sharpen focus and ensure alignment with departmental goals. In others, it required real financial cuts and creative thinking to maintain impact. In one lean year, we identified a critical gap in risk reduction and safety training. I partnered with my supervisor to propose reducing two graduate assistant roles to create funding for a new entry-level position focused on mandated safety education and peer-led risk programming. Though it required a full team restructure,

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this decision planted the seed for a now standalone prevention and risk reduction unit on our campus. This experience taught me that strong financial stewardship requires both strategic discipline and values alignment. As a board member, I would bring a lens of transparency, data-informed decision-making, and creativity to help ensure long-term organizational health without compromising our core commitments.

AFA's strategic plan, 'Forward to 50', will be coming to a close in 2026, and the AFA Board of Directors will be called to think about AFA's future strategic direction. Looking forward into the next five years, in what ways do you see AFA being uniquely called to serve our profession? 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.

The next five years offer a powerful opportunity to reinforce our values, deepen impact, and reimagine our role in a changing student affairs landscape. AFA is uniquely positioned to bridge practice and research while amplifying diverse voices and modeling bold, values-based leadership within the fraternity and sorority profession. My approach to strategic planning begins with vision. What do we want to achieve, and where do we want to be? That vision must be shaped by research and informed by our members. I believe in centering voices across identities and stakeholder types to ensure our goals reflect broad needs and offer meaningful advancement. Once clear themes and outcomes emerge, resources must be aligned to what already exists, and what needs to be created, to move us forward. A clear communication strategy and widespread buy-in are critical to execution. Trust in staff, volunteers, and the strategic direction itself sustains momentum. The Board of Directors plays a key role in this process: not only setting direction, but stewarding AFA's values, ensuring accountability, and empowering others to lead. I believe it would be the job of the board to translate strategy into impact with clarity, integrity, and shared purpose.

As you reflect on this allocation exercise (see next page), please provide some brief commentary on how you approached the allocation of time/energy/resources. Please share any frameworks or perspectives you used in how you allocated your time.

I think the majority of my thoughts here were from a practical lens. One informed by being a long time member and realizing that most people are looking for support from us in ways that matter to them - many things may not matter to them like HR or Budgeting or the minute details here and there, but what matters to them is we are a solid organization. We position ourselves well with other organizations and make meaningful contributions to their growth and the professions growth.

Allocation Exercise

You receive 100 points, each of which can be spent to prioritize the board's time. Allocate these 100 points based on what priority areas you think the board should spend their time on. Allocate more points to those areas that you think are more important.

Priority Area	Points Allotted	Remarks
Annual Meeting Planning	5	Long term goals and strategy regarding overall meeting vision, professional competencies, and finances associated with the Annual meeting are valuable and important elements for a board to weigh in on, however the logistics and planning are best left to staff and other strong volunteers from the profession.
Educational Program Selection	1	The board should provide thematic support and guidance as it may fluctuate year to year, but overall this responsibility can be best supported by staff and teams of valuable volunteers who also have a clear understanding of vision and their charge.
Budget Oversight and Financial Management	13	Having a solid grasp on the financial reality of an organization is a core function. Allowing the board to guide and consult on initiatives and investments builds sustainability in what is offered year on year.
Developing Strategy for Members' Professional Competency and Mentorship	18	Why do we exist if not for developing professional competency and building capacity in and for our part of the educational landscape.
Stakeholder Outreach & Partnership (NASPA, ASCA, FSL Umbrellas, etc.)	13	Being a leader in these partnerships and continuing to foster and build new collaborative relationships is critical in elevating the work of our profession.
Communication Strategy	10	Communication is everything. It can serve as both a relationship building element of our work as well as be a key element of educating throughout the year.
Personnel and Association Human Resources	5	I would expect the day-to-day HR matters to be managed best by the staff, however, larger decisions or upper administrative staff support may need the support of the board.
Creating Professional Community through Technology and Identity/Affinity Spaces	15	Identity/Affinity is becoming harder and harder to discuss and connect about in the ever-restricting educational landscape. Allowing our members to discover shared interests or have commonalities that make them thrive or bring them together is a bright spot in what we can do for our membership.
Advancing Research	12	We should be championing research that informs practice, challenges outdated norms, and elevates all voices. AFA must lead in asking the big questions and translating findings into meaningful action for the profession.
Policy and Position Statement Development	8	Policy and positions statements are rooted in an organization's values. Being able to respond when important issues arise or to make an impact on the field based on data informed direction is a serious element of a board's impact and stewardship of leadership.
Other (Please describe in the appropriate field)	0	N/A