

AFA's Student Development Theory Resource Guide: Helping You Put Theory into Practice

Dan Bureau, University of Memphis

In 2009, AFA leadership charged a committee with the development of a resource to help members apply theory in their work. If you have ever taken a course in graduate school or reviewed other resources from AFA such as *Perspectives* or *Oracle: The Research Journal of the Association of Fraternity/Sorority Advisors*, you know that there are several different theories that inform the work of student affairs every day. These theories come not only from higher education scholars, but also from Psychology, Sociology, and Adult Development. You can imagine that a committee tasked with this job could feel a little overwhelmed with determining what theories are most applicable for fraternity and sorority professionals and how we might create a resource that people can use in their everyday work. The result of three years of work culminated earlier this year with the finalization of *Student Development Theory Resource Guide: Application in Fraternity and Sorority Advising (The Guide)*.

The resource provides an overview of four foundational theories, eight social identity theories, and two environmental theories. For a more thorough explanation of the typology of theories, review the introduction to The Guide. Theories include some of the most pertinent theories for fraternity and sorority advising including Sanford's Psychological Development Theory (also known as "Challenge and Support"), Gilligan's Theory of Women's Moral Development, and Baxter Magolda's Theory of Self-Authorship. Each theory is explained in a way that is easy to understand and examples of how the theory might play out in the fraternity or sorority context are provided.

A section on assessment is also provided. Assessment and theory both play important roles in helping professionals measure the development fraternity/sorority life members gain throughout their collegiate experience.

As you read the guide, consider the following questions:

1. How will my increased understanding about these theories improve my work as a professional?
2. How does theory fit into frameworks for good practice in fraternity and sorority advising such as successfully implementing the CAS Fraternity and Sorority Advising Program Standards and AFA's Core Competencies for Excellence in the Profession?
3. What can I do to be purposeful in applying these theories when I work with students?
4. How can I know if I am helping students to progress through appropriate developmental stages as they experience membership in a fraternity or sorority?

We encourage you to review the resource and discuss theory's application with other AFA members through our Online Community and Twitter (@AFA1976). We believe this resource to be important to the Association helping members to increase their competence as fraternity and sorority professionals.