

THE FUTURE OF FRATS

Rhetoric and Civic Life II

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INTRODUCTION

By Samantha Strong and Jane Zhang

Greek life is prevalent at colleges and universities across the United States, and Penn State is no exception. Penn State's Interfraternity Council (IFC) is the largest in the nation. It is composed of 46 chapters and roughly 4000 students. For a campus that consists of 46,000 undergraduate students, fraternities make the huge campus feel smaller for the students involved.

The basic principles for Penn State Greek life are "Academic Achievement, Service and Philanthropy, Leadership, Brotherhood & Sisterhood, Social, and Alumni Involvement." The university wants fraternities to be healthy communities and a place for students to serve the campus and improve themselves. Fraternities serve the community through their philanthropy efforts, with every fraternity doing community service and many being involved in THON, the largest student-run philanthropy in the world, that has raised millions for the fight against childhood cancer. For students, it is also important to make friends and have fun. Fraternities often foster community within them and have provided generations of students with social and professional opportunities during their years in higher education, some of the most formative in a person's lifetime.



However, fraternities can also bring problems. Safety is one of the biggest concerns. Underage drinking seems to be unavoidable, and the parties where underage drinking often occurs can cause a disturbance to the surrounding community. In recent years, the issue of hazing in fraternities has become very prevalent in the news, causing universities across the country to create policy preventing hazing. These policies have varying levels of success and don't always prevent the issue. Fraternity housing poses another concern.

When fraternities host social events, it is common for it to be hosted at the fraternity house, which has often been passed down through the generations of brothers. The houses are often not designed well if there were to be an emergency, especially in respect to the number of and locations of exits.

In addition to concerns of the safety of those involved in fraternities, there are also social concerns. When fraternities were established, higher education was only for rich, white males and while Greek life has grown and adapted to the new ideals of society, some still criticize it for only including a small group of people, and not being an advocate for diversity and inclusion. With the establishment of the university-wide campaign All In, the university committed to being an inclusive environment that heavily values diversity and respect, and expects the same from its' students. Some people believe fraternities don't foster these ideals and instead foster exclusion.

It seems that fraternities are deviating from ideals and expectations of university. Facing these problems, fraternities need changes. We ask the question: what can be done to have fraternities better align with the ideals of university? To better understand the issues and the problems associated with them, continue reading.

DELIBERATION APPROACHES

CHANGE FRATERNITY HOUSING AND
PRESENCE IN STATE COLLEGE

INCREASE DIVERSITY

INCREASE ACADEMIC AND SERVICE REQUIREMENTS



Change Fraternity Housing and Presence in State College

By Tara Hally and Cassie Pomarico

Originally founded in 1855 as the Farmers High School of Pennsylvania, Penn State University has taken long strides to become the university that it is today. The city of State College has simultaneously developed itself to become a staple college town of America. When considering Penn State as a university, the town of State College comes hand in hand. Many of the businesses around campus have contributed to student organization efforts, such as THON, and are always willing to hold fundraisers for various clubs.

Today, nearly every Penn State fraternity chapter has an off-campus house in the town of State College, however as a member of the State College community, their houses raise concern, as they are typically a place that gather hundreds of college students on weekend nights to engage in (typically underage) drinking.



Not only do they foster noisy and alcohol-filled environments, but it also serves as a location for many hazing incidences throughout the pledging period for the new members of fraternities. This could mean being at the house for many hours of the night, at which point they are asked to perform physically demanding, and potentially harmful, tasks.



Lastly, Penn State is a dry campus, meaning that students are not allowed to drink on campus, even if they are at the legal age for alcohol consumption. All use of alcohol is also prohibited in dorms buildings, in order to keep students safe. At fraternity houses, the Interfraternity Council (IFC) is charged with enforcing safe drinking regulations during registered socials. This means that State College and campus police are not typically involved in overseeing social events, however they do have the right to intervene.

The Pennsylvania state law, known as the “Good Samaritan Act,” protects students who are, themselves, under the influence, and seeking medical assistance for another student who may be impaired or injured from the use of alcohol. Aside from this law, there are loose rules put in place by IFC, however they are not always effective at maintaining a safe environment in fraternity houses, and many times issues arise due to the amount of students at the house and amount of alcohol being served.

In the end, students attend Penn State to receive an education and leave after their time here, with a diploma in hand. Safety is a value that should be further pursued and encouraged by Penn State’s IFC, in order to ensure that every student is able to have a fun college experience, while also taking advantage of the educational opportunities that Penn State has to offer.



WHAT CAN WE DO?

- ◆ Limit alcohol distribution at fraternity houses
- ◆ Enforce a stronger State College and Campus Police presence within Fraternity Houses
 - ◆ Limit the capacity of houses to control crowds

DRAWBACKS

- ◆ Possible rebellion in the face of increased police presence.
 - ◆ Police cannot physically stop students that are walking down the streets, without a cause, limiting impact of increased presence.
- ◆ If the IFC were to put a limit on alcohol distribution students would “pre-game,” leading to consuming alcohol behind closed doors.

Increase Diversity

By Alex Moon and Brad Edwards

Over the course of Greek history in Penn State, the relationship between the school and the Greek members has varied. Although the fraternities are chartered within Penn State, its members often stray from the core values of the university, and toward their respective Greek affiliation. There is a noticeable divide between Greek members and non-affiliated students. In order to have fraternities more aligned with university ideals, the university must create a more active relationship with the Greek entities. Just as much as it is important for the University to support these movements, it is perhaps more important for the Greek community to embrace a stronger presence with the general Penn State community.



WHAT CAN WE DO?

- ◆ Assimilate Greeks and other students through events and socials to promote an inclusive culture.
- ◆ Mandate fraternities to diversify their incoming brothers to eliminate the “rich, white male” stereotype.
- ◆ Greek Life should embrace the university’s All-In campaign and make it a focal point to diversify participants and the organizations it socializes with.

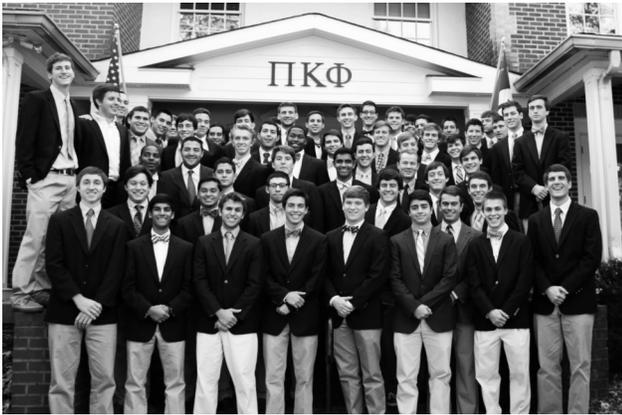
DRAWBACKS

- ◆ The implementation of a mandate for fraternities to diversify could be an infringement of the law and an over-extension of power by the University.
 - ◆ It is possibly unfair to mandate Greeks to attend events.
- ◆ Fraternities are national organizations and are just as much under their national jurisdiction as the University.

Increase Service and Academic Requirements

By Brigette Cannata, Finn Nixdorf, and Dylan Solano

Every year, Penn State Student Affairs releases a handbook for all recognized student organizations at the university. The rules are intended to promote awareness, values, and responsible behavior. The most well known policy may be that “recognized student organizations may not participate in any form of hazing.” Penn State has a “zero tolerance” policy toward any form of hazing, and it is especially prohibited as fraternities seek new members.



The Office of Fraternity and Sorority states that the basic principles of fraternity membership are academic achievement, service and philanthropy, leadership, brotherhood, social involvement, and alumni involvement. Members are intended to live by these principles on a day-to-day basis, both on and off campus. Some of these goals and principles are reflected in fraternity life today, however many have become less prominent over time. A major goal of fraternities is to assist individuals in surpassing their academic potential, meaning that academic achievement should be a priority for each member.

The Penn State Student Affairs website explicitly states that each chapter must maintain a minimum of a 2.5 cumulative grade point average. This means that the grade point averages of fraternity members may drop below a 2.5, and that other chapter members simply “make up” for the grade disparity by holding higher grade point averages. Despite this unfair system, every chapter encourages its members to strive for academic achievement. Each fraternity is required to set specific study hours, initiate goal setting, create progress reports, and offer tutoring sessions. The importance of academics is recognized by the IFC, however it has become apparent through disappointing Greek report cards that academics are no longer on the forefront of the fraternal agenda.



One of the most positive characteristics of fraternities is their dedication to service and philanthropy. Fraternities are expected to participate in a range of community service programs that include tutoring children, organizing fundraising events and competitions, and sponsoring blood drives. The most noticeable of these philanthropic events is the IFC Panhellenic Dance Marathon or THON.

Although fraternities are active in completing community service and philanthropy hours, there is nothing stated on the Penn State Student Affairs website or the IFC's website regarding a minimum number of service hours required by each Greek member. The university should aim to assuage tensions between the Greek community and the residents of State College, PA. Furthermore, they should make efforts to improve the reputation of fraternities in order to reflect well on Penn State University itself.

WHAT CAN WE DO?

- ◆ The IFC can set a minimum GPA for each fraternity member, rather than a cumulative minimum GPA for the entire chapter.
- ◆ The IFC can raise the minimum GPA from 2.5 to 3.0 in order to encourage a greater level of academic achievement.
- ◆ Set a high level of community service hours that must be completed by each member.
- ◆ Create a unbiased governing body to strictly enforce these standards in order to help the community progress amicably as one unified group.
- ◆ Place any member who fails to meet the community service requirement on probation, which will include limiting their social activities.
- ◆ If more than 10% of the fraternity fails to meet the minimum requirements for either GPA or community service, the fraternity will lose accreditation points and be put at risk of becoming an unrecognized organization.

DRAWBACKS

- ◆ Allocating the resources to create and maintain an unbiased governing body.
- ◆ The greater time commitment for fraternity members to maintain their membership may discourage them from joining other university organizations.

Sources

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