

Questions, Issues, Key Points and Trends for Alumnae/i and Undergraduate Leaders

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Thanks for the opportunity and privilege to work with the University of Central Florida Greek community!

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Fourteen Things that Alumni/ae corporations and Advisors should be doing each year, with the understanding that # 2 applies to chapters with houses:

- 1) Sit down with the chapter officers (and a few younger members) each semester and agree on goals and objectives to achieve the goals. A year may encompass two changes in officers. Develop a rhythm for planning with the chapter leaders.
- 2) Review the housing contract at least once each year. Be specific and include expectations regarding behavior and what happens “If”, as in, “If disciplinary action is taken...”. Have a Florida attorney check it for compliance and other issues. Conduct a walk-through inspection of the house at least twice each academic year. Prepare for each period during which occupancy of the chapter house may be reduced to zero—the holidays, spring break and summer, depending upon your schedule. Look to security and extreme variations in the weather. Fire safety is one of the major concerns for Greek letter organizations with a chapter house. Coordinate a visit by a fire marshall or other professional on a regular basis.
- 3) Prepare an emergency plan and circulate the information—especially telephone numbers—among the key undergraduates and other alumni/ae. No one enjoys planning for a fire, a death, a serious injury or a major incident, but that is one of the reasons that we have leaders and board members. Think in terms of who will contact other people, who will speak for the chapter/alumni corporation, and who will be the on-site person.
- 4) Conduct a tradition audit with the chapter president, social chairperson and one or two other undergraduates each semester. Explain that this is not a defensive measure but rather a means of making sure the corporation board members and advisors understand what is happening, week to week. Focus special attention on “traditional” events that carry with them a sense of entitlement. See “Red Ox (sic) Stampede”
- 5) Send out an electronic newsletter to parents and other stakeholders at least once each semester. Designate one member of the board or an advisor as the key contact person. Pack the newsletter with names of members. Be candid and factual—if the chapter is struggling in an area of operations, say so. Leave the spin doctoring to large corporations. Great upside here for special project contributions on a “need” basis. And, the initiation of mothers or fathers into the organization provides new alumni corporation officers and advisors.

- 6) Require that one or two advisors/corporation officers review the new member or pledge program in detail with the new member educator every semester and before the semester begins. Look for a specific start date and a specific conclusion and initiation date. Look for code words, phrases or activities that are not described in detail. Look for variations in the schedule.

Ask the unasked questions—“What does this mean? What happens here?” For men’s groups—look for “pre-initiation” or other activities at the end of the new member or pledge program but before initiation. Hazers thrive in a culture that allows them to inject veiled threats, create adversity and integrate deception into the new member program.

Ask, “I’m a new member or pledge. Take me from 7 p.m. on a Sunday evening to 7 p.m. the next week—what is a typical week for me?” The three most dangerous nights for new members or pledges: _____, _____, _____.

Don’t overreact to practices or events that have slipped into the program. Hazing, like weed growth, must be treated each year. If a transfer student is the new member educator, you may have a few more questions.

- 7) Speak with regional volunteers or consultants from the national organization before a visit. A face to face meeting during or at the end of a visit is especially helpful. Ask for a candid assessment of the chapter.
- 8) At least once each year review and update the corporation bylaws. Spend some time asking yourselves, “What do we do year to year **and** do we have the authority to take those actions?” Areas of concern include: interventions, suspension/removal of officers, eviction from the chapter house.
- 9) Meet with the Greek Advisor at least once each year. Ask for a candid assessment of the chapter.
- 10) File the appropriate forms and fee(s) with the appropriate state office each year to maintain non-profit or association status. A good practice: retain counsel so that this is done automatically.
- 11) Recruiting volunteers? Offer a six-month no cut contract—at the end of six months, the volunteer may step down with your thanks. Most will stay. Invite prospective volunteers to attend a meeting or event first. Like a good chapter, ABR—Always Be Recruiting.
- 12) Some corporations or advisory boards focus upon the chapter to the exclusion of the corporation or advisory board. What are your goals for the next twelve months.....eighteen months.....three years? Association management theory is that three years is the longest plan that can be developed given the always-changing marketplace.
- 13) Review the chapter bylaws with the undergraduates on a yearly basis. “We are in the process of rewriting our bylaws” is one of the staples in chapter newsletters, but note the use of, “...are in the process”. Translation: It ain’t done.
- 14) Spend time at each meeting thinking of ways to recognize alumnae/i volunteers and undergraduates for their work on behalf of the organization.

Trends & Extrapolations

- Less tolerance for problematic behavior by host institutions and many national organizations.
- Email has compounded the difficulty of working with a situation.
- Students are more concerned with community service, more aware of resume' building activities, less inclined to confront or hold peers accountable, more inclined to "remain silent".
- In these times of electronic isolation, there has never been a greater need for interaction and the need for discourse.
- Our parents are going to be very involved. Make that work for your organization. Communicate with them and keep them apprised.
- Liability insurance for men's groups is averaging close to \$150 per man. Women's group rates are slowly increasing but remain well below the men's average.
- More advisors are being drawn from the non-member ranks. Good.
- Men's grade point averages increasing.
- Underground groups are becoming a significant issue on many campuses as men's organizations close more chapters.
- Initiations for men's national organizations may be stabilizing, but the trend since 1990 has been downward.
- Housing: plan on more services, higher maintenance, lower capacity. More study abroad programs taking some of our best leaders from chapters.
- Bill pending in Congress to allow donations to recognized national foundations to be used for bricks and mortar (tax deductible) is slowly progressing. Check the North American Interfraternity Conference website—nicindy.org—or with your national organization to assist with the grass roots effort.