

# Report for Strengthening the Washington State University Fraternity & Sorority Community

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## PROCESS & OVERVIEW

In January of 2005, President V. Lane Rawlins engaged the fraternity/sorority community leaders in a question/answer period via the "Dialogue with President Rawlins." During the course of the dialogue, President Rawlins suggested using external professionals to gather insights about the community's successes and challenges.

While WSU has not had one particular "incident" warranting an evaluation, common issues affecting other fraternity/sorority communities also hinder WSU's progress: risk management issues (primarily alcohol abuse and hazing), the decline of fraternity facilities and related financial concerns, declining numbers of men joining fraternities, lack of local chapter advisors, academic performance, and a lack of basic fraternal values congruence. A community-wide evaluation is important for ongoing reflection for it allows stakeholders to share perspectives as well as learn about and affirm strengths and critical issues.

The Npower campus visit coincided with the Fall WSU Foundation meeting. This allowed fraternity/sorority alumni/ae involved in the Foundation to have a voice as one of the key stakeholder groups. In addition to Foundation-affiliated Greek alumni/ae, Npower conducted 20 focus groups and interviews with 111 WSU student life administrators, faculty, unaffiliated students, chapter presidents, governing council leaders, culturally-based fraternal organization chapter advisors, alumni/ae volunteers, house corporation volunteers, and neighbors October 7-9. Ten additional people who could not attend meetings shared input via phone interviews and email summaries.

Thirteen inter/national representatives from the organizations with chapters on the WSU campus were convened November 21 for their input and perspectives. The group consisted of the highest ranking staff members (Executive Vice Presidents/Executive Directors), directors of chapter services, and other middle-managers.

The fraternity/sorority community at WSU began almost 100 years ago with its first fraternity in 1909 and the first sorority in 1912. We believe there is value in a fraternal experience which supports the academic mission of the University, promotes the highest character in individuals, facilitates life-long friendships, encourages a commitment to organizational values, and demonstrates meaningful, outward-directed generosity through service to others.

The purpose of this evaluation is to serve as a springboard for future improvements. There have been University leadership changes (a resignation, interim VPSA period, and new Dean of Students position) directly impacting the Greek Life Office during the contract period between WSU and Npower. Continued change will affect this dynamic community – and we hope this report can facilitate positive forward movement.

There are pockets of success and excellence in the chapters. At the end of the document we offer several short-term interventions and recommendations. Each campus fraternity/sorority community is unique and cultural change requires the stakeholders to move in lock-step with each other. With student leaders, campus professionals, volunteers, and inter/national staff support, the WSU fraternity/sorority community can make significant strides toward a healthier, values-driven experience.

## KEY THEMES

### ROLE/PHILOSOPHY OF THE GREEK LIFE OFFICE

- **Numerous and conflicting roles**

Campus fraternity/sorority professionals have difficult jobs. Looking at a typical student affairs organizational chart, there are few who have to play such myriad roles as rules/regulations enforcer, judicial officer, policy developer, counselor, event planner, Greek life advocate, values educator, group development expert, educational programmer, workshop presenter, hazing and risk management educator, multicultural and sexual identity educator, classroom teacher, stakeholder convener, housing expert, male/female identity development educators, volunteer trainers, substance abuse educators, leadership advisor/educator, administrator, change agent, alumni/ae relations manager, and headquarters staff partner. Because of these many roles and expectations, stakeholders get confused and frustrated when their individual needs are not met.

The current philosophy appears to be individual leadership development and coaching versus chapter development. There is a need for mentoring relationships among chapter leaders and the Greek Life Office, but the current amount of time spent doing this is disproportionate given the needs of the fraternity and sorority community.

Without clear roles defined, asserted, and communicated, everyone is left to guess or assume what the Office role is – including the office staff itself. In the meantime, everyone uses their own set of high expectations. Without clear roles, the Office staff is being held to an unattainable set of expectations will never pleases anyone.

- **Need for a long-term community strategic plan**

In order for a fraternity and sorority community to thrive, a long-term plan is needed to ensure forward progress. This plan would benefit all involved by making sure they know where they are going and how they are going to get there. This would facilitate building bridges between the University administrators, the Office, alumni/ae, inter/national representatives, and the local chapters.

- **Support from the upper University administration**

Stakeholders perceive there is no clear support and advocacy from the upper level administration or the President. This belief that the University does not support fraternities and sororities breeds mistrust among undergraduates, alumni/ae, and volunteers. Some assume the University does not care or is not supportive. When a clear vision is communicated and strong visible support is given, chapters, undergraduates, and alumni/ae know where they stand and what they need to prioritize for the future.

### SUPPORT/FUNDING

- **The future of funding**

There seems to be no plan for additional future funding for the Greek Life Office. In addition, it is currently one of the lowest paid departments in student affairs. Much can be assumed of the priority of fraternal life on campus by how it is funded. It is troubling that the University's expectations exceed how it has prioritized and funded this department to accomplish their job. The current funding level is insufficient and unrealistic.

- **Additional staff needed**

Virtually no other department on campus has the current scope and expectations of job performance as does the Greek Life Office. These expectations of the university and the funding given to do the job are insufficient. The staff has similar expectations by the university similar to residence life. And yet, they have a staff of few in comparison to residence life. Additional staff is needed to simply accomplish the normal level of expectations in the office. Award-winning Greek communities (Big 12, Big 10, and Pac 10) who have a tradition of successful chapters and councils, WSU is understaffed compared to Miami University of OH, Iowa State University, Penn State University.

- **Professional development**

The Greek Life Office staff is only getting professional development dollars through student fees. Given the expectations and requirements for their positions, this is troubling. Because the students are paying for their professional development, this basically allows for just one professional development experience a year – typically the Association of Fraternity Advisors/North-American Interfraternity Conference (NIC) Annual Meeting. No other opportunities are being provided {i.e. National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA), American College Personnel Association (ACPA), etc.} to build their skills or knowledge.

- **Statewide risk management educational requirements**

The State of Washington has specific educational requirements for fraternal organizations. This can be a very good thing and the Greek Life Office has ensured the students are provided top-level national talent. A troubling fact is the Office receives little to no state or university funding to achieve this requirement.

## **ALUMNI/AE INVOLVEMENT & SUPPORT**

In most of our interviews, people described the fraternity/sorority community as “in transition,” “a work in progress,” and “evolving.” Strong alumni/ae involvement and support could move the community from evolving to succeeding.

- **A desire for more advisory support/role models**

Students want more advisory support from their own alumni/ae. Chapter presidents in particular want strong mentoring and support from advisors who will “have their back” when they have to make unpopular or difficult decisions. They want more of a local presence to turn to for leadership coaching, information, resources, and inter-generational friendship.

Many student leaders feel they have to handle everything on their own, unsure of the resources available to them. They live in fear that their general members’ behaviors will get them into lawsuits. Many students believe they have a difficult time recruiting and retaining alumni/ae advisors because they too live in fear of lawsuits.

- **Location, location, location**

Many alumni/ae members want to be involved but find it difficult to do so when they are based in Seattle or nearby states. Traveling to Pullman for training or meetings becomes especially difficult if they have families and community responsibilities. The Greek Life Office could host training events and meetings in Seattle – other PAC 10 universities do this - but the WSU staff lacks the budget to do this on a regular basis.

The wish list from alumni/ae is manageable – they want ongoing avenues for communicating with like-volunteers. They want and need education around housing: managing money, creating reserve accounts, providing an excellent live-in experience, creating a package of affordable rent and benefits, recruiting live-in advisors, etc. They want and need education on other leadership issues (academic assistance for deficient members, standards of excellence, managing generational difference, etc.).

- **Local chapter guidance and leadership**

Today's alumni/ae volunteers are obviously deeply committed to their chapters and to the success of the community as a whole. Headquarters staff members consistently see their best chapters as those with excellent local chapter advisor involvement. They also worry about the chapters who have one key volunteer – and no succession plans. Many WSU alumni are perplexed by the lack of alumni/ae involvement with the chapters. These alumni/ae teams need more support systems and a deeper “bench.”

Because many undergraduate chapters struggle with recruiting peers, the responsibility of volunteer recruitment must come from current volunteers, inter/national fraternity/sorority representatives, and University staff. They know what skills are needed. They know what the real time commitment and issues are. They can offer a more compelling reason to give back to their own organization from an adult volunteer/employee perspective. The Alumni Association would be a natural partner in this “friend-raising” activity. Headquarters can provide lists of local alumni to cross check with the WSU database.

- **Progressive University support**

Some alumni/ae recognize that communications from the University are improving. Others have basic mistrust of the upper-level administration. There is a perception that the administration is out to “shut the system down” even when many acknowledge that the University President has publicly supported the fraternal organizations several times. There is a small but loud negative element in the alumni ranks perpetuating rumors and gossip. They are actively looking for ways that the University is trying to, in their eyes, destroy the community. This must be quelled by the equally vocal alumni who are tired of these negative attitudes.

Alumni and students want to hear that they are valued. They want to know how they can contribute to the mission of the University. They want meaningful and ongoing dialogue from the highest levels of the University hierarchy.

Without clear expectations and a common commitment to excellence, undergraduates and alumni do not have a clear target for the future. They are unsure about the host institution's priorities regarding fraternal organizations. When the leaders of the groups banded together in the Greek Alliance around a common vision (i.e. raising the grade point average to a 2.8), everyone wins. As one former national fraternity president has said, “A rising tide saves all ships.”

- **Emerging role of the Greek Alumni Organization**

As a convener of alumni, the newly forming Greek Alumni Organization (GAO) is a constituency group supported by the University Alumni Association. Its current mission is “to assist the University and Alumni Association in achieving their goals by serving as advocates for the Greek system at Washington State University, providing mentoring, career networking and professional assistance to all s, encouraging academic and intellectual growth among undergraduates and by creating a supportive environment between all s, the Alumni Association and Washington State University.”

Understandably, the University wants a single group to easily communicate with Greek alumni instead of with thousands of individuals. The University can easily get into a communication triumvirate of the President, WSU Alumni Association, and GAO. In this model, there is no room for the Greek Life Office, culturally-based fraternal voices, or headquarters' staff voices. This could become convoluted if the campus fraternity/sorority professionals with student development backgrounds are circumvented. Some alumni are naturally very focused on housing. However, if this continues as the main focus of energy and communication in the GAO, the culturally-based organizations could easily become further alienated and disengaged in the entire Greek community. If the GAO gets too focused on any one issue (such as housing), it ceases to meet the needs of the collective thus potentially alienating or just boring its constituents.

The student affairs division and the GAO must communicate on the front end of this system-wide development process. Without clear definition of roles and purpose, many of these good intentions and efforts could collide and cause more problems than solutions.

This GAO has the potential to serve as a critical communication link between the Office of Greek Life and alumni/ae. If they are truly purpose-driven they will aggressively build relationships interfraternally among alumni/ae and build communication channels with the University staff and students.

Having watched other new GAOs assert their roles, some begin to lose their focus and delve into governance and administrative issues which are the responsibility of the University. The Greek Board of Governors (in the draft Constitution) consists of two representatives from each existing and former chapter. This group quickly grows to around 100 people. For example, Ohio State University currently has 66 chapters but only 18 individuals on the Board of Governors – a manageable decision-making group.

While this organization can play an important role facilitating communication through stronger relationships, it cannot substitute for local chapter guidance and leadership. As the headquarters staff members/volunteers shared, "We need feet on the ground."

## **HOUSING & MEN'S RECRUITMENT**

- **Future housing options**

The Greek Life Office strategic plan outlines some University strategies related to housing. The University could decide to purchase the chapter property and lease back to each individual house corporation. Some alumni/ae love this idea as it would get them out of the downward spiral. Others deepen their mistrust about the University's perceived motives of pushing the fraternities and sororities off campus permanently.

- **Fraternity housing**

The fraternities are in a housing crisis. Fraternity facilities are generally in poor shape. They have signed house corporation contracts but these contracts are not being enforced. It appears that fraternities are in a difficult position of either not charging enough dues and ensuring the collection of the existing dues and trying to find the appropriate pricing point to remain competitive with the other housing options. This is compounded by the current belief held by many fraternities that if they could just move freshmen directly into their chapter house it would solve all of their problems.

- **Live-out houses and apartments**

There is a major problem with the live-out residences and keeping the house occupancy full. Contracts for live-outs are typically signed in October for the following year. The chapters are not beating this deadline and securing signed housing agreements with their members, thus resulting in low occupancy. Because of the close proximity of these live-outs and apartments to the chapter houses a tradition exists of passing them down to other members of the chapters. These residences also provide social "safe havens" where students believe risk management rules do not apply.

- **Safety first, but still not competitive**

With several tragic events happening across the nation involving fraternity housing, students and alums alike know that they need to provide housing environments where basic level safety needs are ensured. The chapter leaders, alumni, and the University have shown great collaboration to make sure all chapter houses are outfitted with fire sprinkler systems for safety through the earlier efforts of the Greek Alliance committee.

However, the money going to the sprinklers has replaced the money available for renovations and improvements to the chapter facilities. In some cases, chapters have fallen significantly behind in basic house improvements.

Social events are only being held at the fraternities and have damaged the structures. Women should play a leadership role in stopping this and should pass legislation not to function at the fraternity chapter houses.

- **Little to no adult live-in presence**

Many of the men's fraternities do not have a live-in adult house director. Greek Live In Advisors are required for chapters granted Freshman Approved Housing status (WSU Freshman Approved Housing Policy). Overwhelmed alumni volunteers are having a difficult time to fill the live-in housing positions. These alumni feel underserved by their own inter/national organizations, the University, and local chapters in this area. Undergraduates who do not have the knowledge of owning and maintaining a home are mostly left in charge.

- **Fraternity recruitment**

The men's recruitment numbers continue to decrease over the past several years. The current system of recruitment for the men is counter to what the national fraternities and the NIC suggests. The men are running a National Panhellenic Conference (NPC) process of recruitment. The Greek Life Office staff feels it is working because the initiates say they like it and the fraternities say they want it because it delivers the interested men to their front door. This allows the fraternities to be passive.

Chapters do not actively recruit throughout the year and the process is still producing worse numbers every year. Very little summer recruitment happens (some chapters have events, though most involved say it doesn't happen); therefore they are not recruiting before individuals sign housing contracts with residence life or the live-outs, thus compounding their housing problem.

Housing combined with poor new member education programs (which may involve some level of hazing) is not only producing low numbers, but new recruits now become members who have been poorly, and in some cases inappropriately, taught about values-based membership.

The university requires freshmen to live in residence halls or approved housing, which is not unusual. It is important, however, that the university be good stewards of money. The NIC recommends against sanctions prohibiting freshmen from living in a chapter facility; rather it suggests having educational sanctions (see the Tier 3 of the Non-Compliance with the 2.8 Scholarship Standard). Even though this sanction was recommended by the Greek Alliance (with both alumni and student participants) this could be seen as a move to “bankrupt” the chapters.

- **Desire for a playing field like the residence life system**

Alumni/ae are frustrated with what they view as stricter standards for fraternities and sororities than the residence halls. They want the same level of staffing support for the Greek community though this is an “apples to oranges” comparison.

The Residence Life department enjoys several layers of staff members to manage its 4339 residents in its halls, single student apartments and family housing units. To support the residents, structures, and other living laboratory work, Residence Life employs 145 Resident Assistants, 15 Assistant Hall Directors, 15 Hall Directors, and 3 central staff. These employees are supported by room and board fees and not state or University central funds.

Some universities own the fraternity and sorority houses and can assert themselves as the landlords. In these cases the University can staff chapter houses with a resident assistant, a graduate student, or professional house director. They can also closely enforce behavioral guidelines from its residents because they have a vested interest in maintaining the facilities and protecting the University’s assets. In these cases the institution takes on the role of landlord and facilities manager and the alumni/ae can focus on individual member and chapter development issues. They do not have to worry about the physical plant.

The WSU Greeks are not in this residence life system because each individual house corporation serves as a landlord. Because of this variable, the dues, rent, and live-in benefits vary from chapter to chapter.

Some Greek alumni/ae may view the residence life system as the institution encroaching on their territory. Others may view this structure as the best way for a host institution to support its chapters.

## **RISK MANAGEMENT**

- **Alcohol culture**

The Greek community does not exist in a vacuum and it is not the only source of alcohol-related events and problems. Students, police officers, staff, and alumni/ae describe many WSU events such as Homecoming and Moms and Dads Weekends as “alcohol-soaked.” Community disturbances and even arrests occur during these weekends and they are not always the students...or even the fraternity and sorority members.

There are parties in the apartments. One apartment community has an annual Courtyard Party. Senior Golf (not sanctioned by the University) encourages students go to live-outs for a drink at each golf “hole.”

The current over/under stamping system of the Greek Alcohol Policy is not working. Police officers routinely ticket students for underage drinking. The men still feel the responsibility of hosting parties and general sorority members expect to be served alcohol.

Chapter and council leaders acknowledge that “alcohol is really holding us back.” New groups established as alcohol-free are challenged. In the words of one student “It’s hard to be different here.” New or reorganized fraternities may start with lofty goals related to alcohol use but when the sororities don’t attend events or just show for a very short period of time to the alcohol-free events, they feel the draw of alcohol. The women admit their attendance would be lower. There is little support for the fraternity leaders to change the party dynamic.

- **Live-out facilities**

Neighbors expect foot traffic and activity in a college town. That is part of the normal energy of living next to student housing. However, the live-out houses are associated with noise, trash in the street, public urination, and drunken students milling around in the yards. Some describe them as a “crack houses” and both unaffiliated and affiliated students call them “rough” at best.

These facilities can be risk management nightmares because of the behaviors, size, and structural quality of the facilities. The landlords have a constant stream of students wanting their independence to live in and chapters are tied to the legacy of certain live-outs. Police try to ensure safety and legal drinking but the culture of these facilities is deep-set.

- **Eliminating hazing**

When members and leaders are “not sure if we’ve transitioned away from hazing,” this signals trouble. The topic of hazing is a touchy subject and naturally, students don’t want to talk about too many details to avoid punishment. But, this is a “major concern” of student leaders and it should be.

Activities which could be defined as hazing are often tied to alcohol. “Detox” (alcohol poisoning) is a part of the student and staff vernacular. They are not surprising incidents to them. Some students are very creative coming up with different ways to encourage fast drinking and a lot of drinking.

They have said that the definition of hazing is “vague.” Students want to know what their limits are – this may not be an effort to live up to lofty ideals but rather to see what types of activities they can get away with. The community must understand both the letter and the spirit of the hazing policy.

We believe hazing education also needs to happen on a larger scale. Alumni/ae must be re-educated about acceptable and unacceptable activities to re-emphasize the value of brotherhood/sisterhood. All stakeholders must understand their role in stopping hazing.

Hazing is a critical issue. Students and alumni do not understand that if a chapter is found guilty of hazing, they (according to the State of Washington Hazing Law) will lose its recognition with the University. This creates an unusual system of chapters recognized and unrecognized by the governing councils and the University.

- **Young leadership**

Many live in fear of lawsuits, hurt members from alcohol abuse, hazing allegations, campus judicial hearings, and alcohol poisoning. It is difficult to lead with so much fear. Second-year students/members find it difficult to stand up for themselves and their fraternal principles.

The general members themselves also make it difficult for their young elected brothers and sisters to lead. Student leaders believe their members have “no clue” on risk management issues. Leaders say the members don’t realize the jeopardy they put their own leaders in by looking for loopholes in risk management policies and procedures. Like many young college students, they have feelings of invincibility and a “live for the moment” attitude. Some frustrated leaders think their members have a sense of entitlement and believe it is “inconvenient for them to live up to our Ritual.”

University staff members outside of the Greek Life Office and students themselves feel that leadership positions aren’t prestigious. The upperclassmen wield incredible influence through their actions. They don’t live in the houses even when they are required to do so. They don’t attend activities or meetings. They are not around to lead by positive example. This creates a leadership gap in the chapter and models a 2-3 year chapter experience for the younger members.

- **Self-governance abilities**

Most chapters do not have fully functioning standards or honor boards. While every inter/national organization provides resources for developing these boards, the chapters at WSU don’t have strong peer accountability practices. This is a critical tool for self-governance within the chapters. These boards should be led by the most respected and experienced members in the chapter. This peer influence and accountability is critical to communicate expectations and to sanction members.

Governing council leaders take care of by-laws and other policy violations. These incidents run the gamut from inappropriate t-shirts, unregistered events, to recruitment issues. The Student Conduct Office is responsible for the most egregious individual student and group behaviors. Not having heard risk management or hazing cases, students’ moral development is stunted from not having the experience of peer adjudication. The governing council leaders do not have mock trials to discuss what they would do in the shoes of the conduct board to at least argue about what is appropriate and inappropriate.

- **A growing alumni/ae/student culture clash**

A culture clash between alumni/ae and students is developing at WSU. The quality of incoming students is steadily and intentionally increasing through higher admissions standards. WSU is becoming a very academically rigorous institution. The old party mentality is being shifted and students don’t feel they are getting enough support from the University to facilitate this change.

Many stakeholders see some alumni/ae as reliving the glory days of parties and fun. Some alumni/ae who come back for the social aspects focus on just that, socializing with each other and the undergraduates using the chapter houses as the place to party. While undergraduates know their inter/national and University policies, it is difficult for 18-22 year old members to confront alumni/ae about their behaviors at a tailgate party. Conversations about “partying smart and safe” aren’t going to happen at an alcohol-soaked event. Undergraduates struggle with alumni/ae longing for and bragging about the “way things used to be.” Without mature alumni/ae mentors supporting the chapter leaders in this area, they are doomed to fail in these conversations. Positive social norming needs to come from alumni/ae role models in addition to the students.

Alumni/ae want values congruence from their younger brothers and sisters. They want their organization's principles to be viewed as lofty ideals and goals, something to always strive for. A strong alumni/ae presence and chapter education would help chapter members live up to the ideals upon which their organization was founded. With declining memberships and fewer chapters, alumni/ae sense many chapters are loosening their standards to keep their numbers up.

- **Risk management education**

Washington House Bill 1082 – the Heavey Bill – requires all Washington state institutions to enter into a written agreement with its fraternal organizations (see chapter 227 of Washington Laws 1993). Educational programs on substance abuse and sexual assault are mandated for fraternities and sororities in this law. State law (RCW 28B.10.901 and 28B.10.902 also requires an annual hazing educational program for fraternities and sororities each year.

IFC and Panhellenic also requires its chapters to conduct a program for its members on cultural diversity. The WSU Greeks have been recognized for these keynotes by their regional leadership association. The students believe they get quality speakers with good messages. They are proud of the fact that 80% of their chapter members must attend the educational programs and that they do turn out for them. While the programs are good, students recognize that in the general membership, there is no significant behavioral change because of them.

Perhaps the most important and most meaningful programs are those which occur with brothers or sisters only. Chapters who choose to open their doors to the Counseling Services Greek Liaison Program benefit greatly. This program has unique elements that go beyond the keynote speakers. Members can ask questions in an emotionally safe environment, they get good information, and genuinely like the staff. Most important, the members have open conversations about important issues (eating disorders, sexual communications, alcohol and drug abuse, etc.).

From the Counseling Center perspective they are also learning about self-management and acting as caring brothers/sisters. They are learning about self-correcting behaviors like talking about expectations and behaviors before something goes wrong. This is a good example of individual self-regulation.

- **Non-alcoholic programming**

While there is a culture of alcohol use, there is also interest in non-alcoholic programming from the general student body. Campus Involvement's first Up All Night program of the year attracted 1300 students. In the past they have had audience of 500-600 people attending the 10 p.m.-2 a.m. programs. Live bands, a four-square contest, and other activities are considered "cool" and fun alternative weekend programs.

- **Police involvement and support**

The police force is entrusted with the overall safety of the Pullman community. Fortunately, the police have a beat cop assigned to the South College Hill area to monitor safety and create relationships with the residents.

Campus and Pullman police officers meet regularly with the Greek Life Office, Student Conduct, and Residence Life staff to discuss student behaviors, arrests, group problems, and other issues. This is a very positive intervention but the police want to see and hear positive results of these meetings since it takes additional time. Like other University budget areas, police staffing/funding are becoming more challenging. Increasing enrollment brings increasing call volume. And, with fewer staff members this will become more difficult.

The police concur that the Cougar Accountability documents helped shape behaviors but they do want to see significant improvement in the future. They continue to be concerned about underage drinking and will be until the students can manage their social events more responsibly. They are helpful resources for students to turn to keep their events safe and legal.

## **COMMUNICATION GAP**

- **Trust**

The University President has publicly said he supports the Greeks. Even with that public message, students and alumni/ae still believe the upper level administration is “out to kill fraternities.”

Alumni/ae who have been long-time volunteers are frustrated. They want to see more visible and sincere support. They want professionals in the Greek Life Office as advocates for their needs and issues. The suspicion and conspiracy theories aren't helping to build the badly needed trust between the host institution and the fraternity and sorority members. Trust is the basic element missing in this dynamic relationship.

- **Systems and processes**

Some campus administrative processes confuse stakeholders, especially the conduct and recognition/reorganization processes. The Tier system for Non-compliance with the Scholarship Standards is very clear. The community would also benefit from a discussion about clear Tiers when hazing and other risk management incidents occur. These are two areas requiring regular (annual) education and training for students and alumni/ae alike given the weight of those judicial decisions. Given the normal and ever-changing leadership teams of undergraduates, they need to understand the purpose and philosophy of the processes.

- **No strategic communication plan**

Currently there is no strategic communication plan to keep all stakeholders up to date on the Greek community. Because of the speed of technology, there is heavy reliance on the Web and through email. Regular email messages are sent to volunteers but information comes in snippets not in a thoughtful plan for each audience. There is a website section for local advisors with meeting dates, topics, and locations. It has resources specific to advisors, FAQs, historical documents from the Greek Alliance, and miscellaneous information. The office would benefit from a thoughtful, strategic communication plan aimed at different Greek life stakeholders (headquarters staff, house corporation volunteers, advisors, student leaders, student affairs colleagues, etc.). Headquarters staffs would like regular updates since annual reports are “old news” as soon as they receive it.

- **Student gatekeepers**

Currently the Greek Life Office staff has bi-weekly meetings with chapter leaders. These one-on-one meetings are wonderful ways to build trust and for co-creating plans of action for the chapters. However, chapter presidents are busy students who often filter, distort, or drop communications. Communications may never get to general members or to alumni/ae. If a president misses a meeting, he/she creates a huge gap in time and communications.

- **Greeks hurt themselves**

Non-Greek stakeholders believe that fraternities and sororities get “pretty good coverage” in the *Daily Evergreen*. On the other hand, Greeks don’t think enough good news gets out. Sometimes chapter leaders don’t facilitate their own good public relations. The Campus Involvement staff wanted to make sure they don’t plan events on top of major philanthropic and other events. They asked for this several times but student leaders were not proactive giving them a calendar of events. Headquarters staff members don’t hear of the good news from their WSU chapters.

Unaffiliated students and even those who went through the recruitment process criticized the Greek life promo CD. Many of them are first-generation college students and did not feel like they had enough information about the recruitment process. They said the information seemed to be aimed at current members encouraging them to get involved. It did not cover how to make an informed decision about choosing and joining a chapter. The Panhellenic Recruitment Guides were not helpful as they said to “trust your gut” and “you’ll just know when a chapter feels like the right organization to join.” Without more basic information, the prospective members said the CD was “not good and felt fake – like they were giving you the answers you were supposed to hear.”

A common complaint from fraternity and sorority members is that just the bad news gets covered in the newspaper. The challenge is if members are behaving in ways which are antithetical to their own organization or are breaking University (or their own) policies and/or local laws, no amount of good public relations can make up for those public actions.

## **CULTURALLY-BASED FRATERNITIES & SORORITIES**

- **Base level support is needed**

Students in multicultural fraternities and sororities feel isolated and unsupported. They don’t feel supported, valued, or heard. They raised concerns about other Greeks lacking knowledge about their organizations, their history, their values, and their role. When asked for their needs or wants, they were at a loss to give any concrete answers for fear of being disappointed again. Unmet promises cultivate the lack of trust among students and almost all levels of the University.

- **Need for advisory support and communication**

A group of University volunteers has done a good job opening the lines of intra-community communication and relying on each other for support. But the fact that the advisory group said they had never had a meeting with all of them together and the Greek Life Office is troubling. Some people are confused believing the culturally-based chapters are not advised out of the Greek Life Office. There is currently a University staff position being recruited/filled to provide additional support for the NALFO and NPHC organizations. While current intentions may seem logical on paper, this person will be supervised out of both the Campus Involvement and Greek Life Offices – providing more opportunities for confusion and miscommunication.

- **A clear disconnect**

Multicultural fraternity and sorority members feel disconnected with the University. In many ways they don't feel like they have a "home." Students are unsure whether they should work through the Multicultural Student Services Office, Campus Involvement, or Greek Life Office. They question, Are they a registered student organization or do they fall under the Greek Life Office as a fraternal organization? Or both? Because the culturally-based organizations don't know where home is they feel further disconnected to the University staff and potential support networks available to them. With student organizations not knowing where their home is it leads to misinterpretation of policies, procedures, rules, and regulations and feelings of mistrust and neglect.

## **VALUES/BEHAVIOR CONGRUENCE**

Say vs. Do. Currently there seems to be a clear break between espoused values and alcohol use. This particular challenge is being demonstrated at all levels from recruitment, to new member education, expectations of membership, enforcement of standards, lack of senior leadership, and the challenges associated with housing for those chapters who have houses. This is also complicated by the lack of third-party vendor options and where social events are taking place.

- **Community**

The undergraduate fraternity and sorority community does seem to have significant collaboration and support for each other. In particular, existing chapters are supportive of new and expanding groups on campus. Support for this is oftentimes rare on college campuses and speaks to the level of interfraternalism and the value they have for options and variety among Greek organizations. This is a healthy sign for the community.

This should be further capitalized upon with other important issues facing the fraternity and sorority community. Currently the governing councils are involved with the neighborhood associations to hear concerns and provide the ability to have dialogue regarding expectations and behavior.

- **Lifelong membership**

Lifelong membership is a current challenge at WSU. Interfraternity and Panhellenic chapters are struggling to make sure they have a full four-year experience. The value of lifelong membership must start from new member education and reinforced throughout the undergraduate experience. Because of the lack of a long-term perspective, chapters are reactive and not proactive to several issues facing their organizations. Without undergraduate members buying into a life-long commitment, chapters are producing disconnected alumni/ae. This will leave fewer alumni giving back in the community as volunteers and as financial contributors.

- **Lack of senior chapter leadership and involvement**

Chapter educational programming and energies are focused on the new students/freshmen through pledge/new member orientation. We did not hear of any productive or innovative initiatives for senior members. Thus, the chapter experience becomes irrelevant for seniors. By the time members are seniors they have a "been there, done that" attitude. They've seen all the old parties, philanthropic events, and even member-only events and haven't seen anything specific to their needs as seniors ready to embark on their careers. In effect, this dynamic cuts the four-year undergraduate Greek experience down to two or three years. This has led to a situation where seniors are not living in chapter houses and are not seeking higher leadership positions.

- **Philanthropy**

Without question, philanthropy was one of the clear strengths of the fraternity and sorority community at WSU. Virtually all chapters have some philanthropic cause that they are involved with and support on an annual or more frequent basis. Significantly more can be done in the area of philanthropy but good initial steps have been made. For a reality check, community members should count the number of members and divide it by the money they raise. Many Greek communities across the country brag about the money they raise but when they look at the real numbers they find that it only ends up \$2-3 per person.

Chapter members must remember that philanthropy (fund raising) is an important part of giving back to the community. Equally, if not more important is hands-on community service. Some chapter leaders understand that without an emotional connection with the people supported through fundraising, there becomes an easy habit of simple check swapping. If service is considered a strength and value of the community, then the leaders of the councils and chapters should really question the relevance and means of raising the money as many chapter events need to be evaluated.

- **Leadership**

Several of the Interfraternity and Panhellenic Council officers have been well educated on issues facing the fraternity and sorority community. The Greek Life Office works to provide additional leaders the opportunity to attend national and chapter oriented leadership conferences. This has led to advanced leadership education for those individuals at the system-wide level and should be complimented. Unfortunately, there has been a wider disconnect between the students who have this knowledge and the average member involved within a chapter. General members are only being reached through the four required programs.

- **Unrecognized chapters**

There is a significant problem with unrecognized chapters on campus. Other fraternities watch a chapter who does not have to abide by any of the University rules and regulations and continues to do well with recruitment. Why should other fraternities comply with policies when they have such an obvious example next door? This general member rationale makes for a difficult environment to lead with integrity for leaders and members. This issue is a combined challenge for the University, the Greek Life Office, alumni/ae, and the national headquarters of all groups.

## Recommendations for Action for the Washington State University Fraternity & Sorority Community

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### Short-Term Recommendations for Action

“Though no one can go back and make a brand new start,  
anyone can start from now and make a brand new ending.”  
– Carl Bard, author

WSU has a long history of fraternity and sorority life and will continue to exist on campus. Given the timing of the community's founding in 1909, we present the recommendations for a potential strategic plan focused on a WSU Greek Centennial Celebration in 2009.

Now is a time for collective action to becoming a successful and significant Greek community. Just as some areas of the Greek experience have declined slowly, change will come slowly too. Establishing priority action steps with commitment from students and support from the University and its alumni will be the key to starting the change process.

The professionals, students, alumni, and other stakeholders know the WSU culture, habits, abilities, and resources the best. These sample recommendations for short-term action come from the Npower Circle of Friends – topic experts who are long-time advocates of a positive Greek experience.

**NOTE:** These strategic alternatives are not listed in priority order because a WSU oversight committee, strategic planning committee, or task force should determine the best course of action and timeline for the strategic initiatives. Regardless of the option chosen, this committee or task force should remain relatively small (under 10). A successful campus committee should include students (positional leaders), university staff/administration, alumni/ae (chapter advisor/house corporation volunteers), Greek Life Office staff, and any other targeted groups.

While many of the sample recommendations for action come from topic experts and the Npower consultants, remember there is no quick fix - only hard work and commitment from all stakeholders in the near future.

### ROLE & PHILOSOPHY OF THE GREEK LIFE OFFICE

- Empowerment comes in many forms; establishing boundaries, giving authority, shaping responsibilities, and increasing budgets to support programs and personnel. Empower the staff to assert their niche and help them shape their office philosophy. Alumni, students, and staff want “teeth” behind this change initiative. Money to do the things expected of the staff is critical.

- Hold a staff retreat to get clear on vision, mission, and philosophy of the office and then work strategically with stakeholders. Utilize the Association of Fraternity Advisors *Advising Fraternities & Sororities* manual and its "Advising Councils & Chapters" chapter. Determine two to three core emphases for the office. Tap into the talents and resources of others to implement the secondary and tertiary responsibilities (i.e. educational programming such as the community-wide workshops and poster series could be done by students).
- Make a philosophical decision that involves the administration: Is it in the best interest of the University and the University's fraternity and sorority community to serve the long term health of the Greek community or to focus work on the current student population? If the focus is on long-term growth and success of the community, less time should be spent on day to day questions/answers. Invest more time building relationships with strategic partners. Think of it as a pyramid. More students can be reached with five rather than two graduate students. With this model, the professionals spend their time teaching the graduate students how to advise and the graduate students spend their time teaching the presidents and council leaders. Part of the Greek Life Office philosophy, especially if under-funded and understaffed, should be to make the most of resources.
- Make a list of all the issues of the community. Then prioritize into fixable/not fixable, short term and easy to fix/long term and difficult. Which items, if focused on, can make the most change?
- Spend time cultivating alumni advisors for the chapters and teaching them how to work with their chapters.
- Leverage the leadership and influence of the national sorority presidents. Sorority problems can easily be solved by collaborating the national presidents and NPC delegates.

## **ALUMNI INVOLVEMENT & SUPPORT**

- Hold a meeting with the Vice President for Students Affairs, new Dean of Students, Director of Greek Life, Director of Alumni Affairs, and Greek Alumni Organization leaders to openly and honestly discuss the report, Greek Life Office philosophy and priorities, immediate next steps for action, and strategic planning for the community. Come to an agreement on roles and expectations of each party.
- Look at UCLA's alumni recruitment and volunteer training. They have developed an excellent model of educating and recruiting alumni/ae.
- Recruit alumni volunteers - communicate a need, ask for help, and follow up with the volunteers. People volunteer when they see a need and when they have the time, effort, money, and desire to participate. And, when they volunteer, they expect to be utilized.

- Develop a quarterly or monthly newsletter to distribute to Greek alumni. Consistent communication from the Greek Life Office would demonstrate the University's commitment to maintaining Greek life on campus, educate alumni on proposed or recent policy changes, and send a cohesive message about the state of Greek Life on campus. Without that link, alumni are not likely to volunteer or participate in recruitment, house maintenance, or management of the chapters. While many alumni hear from their own chapter about what is happening on campus, most are also interested in hearing about the successes of other chapters.

## **HOUSING & MEN'S RECRUITMENT**

- The fraternity/sorority community at Washington State University must answer the following question about housing: Does the community, and its affiliated chapters and house corporations, want to be in the housing business? The work of house corporations is important for the preservation of chapter assets. The responsibility is also a legal one given that most house corporations are legal entities recognized by the state.
- Gather Best Practices for house corporations and research the resources available for discussion during strategic planning.
- Create a Washington State University Housing Summit. The question of housing relevance should be debated and discussed. This discussion must ask the difficult questions i.e. "if housing is so important to Greeks, why do many of our fraternity house corporations neglect their property?" (The assumption being that Greek housing is important to the Greek mission.) A desired outcome of this summit might be the implementation/adoption of Greek Housing Standards and an enforcement plan.

## **RISK MANAGEMENT**

- Follow the letter and the spirit of the hazing policy. The campus hazing policy mirrors most inter/national organization and most campus hazing policies. This is critical; state law mandates the loss of recognition for chapters and will place these groups in a no-win situation - no recognition from governing councils or the University, unrecognized status with the inter/national organization, etc. Students and alumni must understand the myriad implications of hazing.
- Place greater emphasis on the Risk Management Award at the annual Greek Awards Banquet.

## **COMMUNICATION GAP**

- Because of the current mistrust, senior student affairs staff must determine their critical role as trustees in this process. A communication plan must be developed to assure that the community is kept informed each step of the way to keep the process transparent.

- Reevaluate the Greek Life website. Does it promote what you want? Do the judicial sanctions need to be on there? Who are the heroes of the community who are doing the right thing? Does it appeal to non-members who they're trying to woo?

## **CULTURALLY-BASED FRATERNITIES & SORORITIES**

- Inform and remind NALFO and NPHC students and student leaders that they are advised out of the Greek Life Office. The Multicultural Student Center staff can still serve as advisors and resources but they also need direction on fraternal issues and chapter development.
- Hire a staff member who is fully versed on the distinct needs and practices (recruitment, step shows, membership intake process, etc.) of these groups.
- Hold monthly meetings with all fraternal student leaders to promote communication and sharing of best practices with the guidance of the advisors. Create avenues for open communication that will facilitate relationships between the organizations and the Office of Greek Life. With such intense emotions and strong sentiment from the NALFO and NPHC groups, it is important to involve students in the process of communicating new initiatives, plans, and practices.

## **VALUES/BEHAVIOR CONGRUENCE**

- Help students learn how to self-govern and balance proactive education and chapter/individual accountability. Coordinate a theory-to-practice session by collecting all standards/honor board materials and inviting chapter leaders to ask questions, practice with case studies, learn confrontation skills, and plan for implementation in the chapter.
- Help leaders re-establish chapter standards boards. Teach the critical thinking, problem solving, and confrontation skills needed to guide those boards.
- Look at Ohio State University's peer review elements in the Standards of Excellence. Student leaders must be invested in improving their chapters as well as the community as a whole.
- Contact the NIC and use their arbitration process to work with Pi Kappa Alpha Headquarters staff to manage the rogue chapter. This process has proved successful in eliminating rogue chapters. Consider denying access to campus and community resources under assumed names. Review the student code to see if membership in an unrecognized organization is supported or is a violation.
- Suggest that Greek Councils pass a resolution to not support or attend activities sponsored by the underground organization. The resolution should include accountability measures for any organizations that sponsor activities with the organization.
- Make public statements (i.e. President or chief student affairs professional) about the risks associated in joining these groups to parents.



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[www.npoweryourself.com/WSU Evaluator Bios.pdf](http://www.npoweryourself.com/WSU_Evaluator_Bios.pdf)