

Overview and Evaluation of
the Five Star Chapter Evaluation Program

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Journal of Student Affairs in Higher Education

October 16, 1998

Introduction

Greek organizations on campus have been under increasing scrutiny for decades. In 1978, fraternal organizations (the words “fraternal” or “fraternity” refer to both men’s and women’s Greek letter organizations) suffered from the perpetuation of stereotypes in pop culture. The movie *Animal House* (1978) portrayed a fraternity as men sharing a house with no interest in scholarship, showing little respect for women, and having a serious commitment to alcohol and parties. In recent years, there has been an increase in the debate over the contribution of these organizations to the educational mission of universities. In fact, many argue institutions actually are harmed by such organizations. In Fall 1997, Greek-related incidents at Louisiana State University and Massachusetts Institute of Technology resulted in the deaths of two fraternity men, thus increasing the intensity of Greek criticism across the nation (Kalb & McCormick, 1998).

Description

Many higher education institutions have responded to such incidents described above and criticism of the Greek system by limiting or removing all institutional support for Greek organizations. Ironically, only a small number of educational institutions have taken a developmental and educational approach. One strong example of an educational approach can be found at the University of Delaware, which has taken a positive step by developing and instituting what they term the *Five Star Chapter Evaluation Program*. According to Noel Hart, Director of Greek Life at the University of Delaware, the program is the tool the University was looking for to help make the Greek system at the University of Delaware a positive experience for students involved in Greek organizations. Based on similar programs at the University of Maryland, Utah State, and

the University of Arkansas, the University of Delaware designed the Evaluation Program as a direct response to binge drinking, hazing, and a general degradation of Greek housing (N. Hart, personal communication, September 30, 1998).

Fraternal organizations were founded on core values such as, trust, loyalty, mutual respect, and concern for others. The *Five Star Chapter Evaluation Program* is based on a return to those espoused core values. The Program is meant to reward chapters for excellent work, sanction chapters that are not living up to their core values, and identify areas of improvement for all chapters to strive for excellence. The Program utilizes a point system based on earning points in five basic areas: academics, financial management, university/community relations and service, campus involvement, and new membership recruitment and education program. A total of 494 points are available. Any chapter earning 90% of the possible points is awarded five star status, 77% earns four star status, 64% earns three star status, 51% earns two star status, and 37% earns one star status. Points can be earned in a variety of ways. For example, a chapter can earn 94 points for having an average grade point average (GPA) that exceeds that of the University average for the gender of the chapter. A variety of smaller points can be earned for having a GPA requirement for potential new members, having a chapter budget approved by the organizations advisor, and member participation in community events (University of Delaware, 1998).

Steps to Implementation and Positive Impact

The University of Delaware has seen impressive improvements in its Greek system after implementing the *Five Star Chapter Evaluation Program* for three years. For example, the all-fraternity GPA average is higher than the all-men's average GPA at

the University. In addition, the three chapters that earned five star status had very successful recruitment periods this past fall. This has improved the attitude and image of Greeks throughout the campus community. Recognizing this success, the University of Delaware continues to raise the standard by increasing the percentages needed to earn points (N. Hart, personal communication, September 30, 1998).

Institution-wide support has contributed to the success of the *Five Star Chapter Evaluation Program*. The sanctions for not meeting the standards of the program are upheld, and benefits rewarded for exceptional chapters, because the Faculty Senate of the University of Delaware approved the Program. Since the Faculty Senate creates institutional policy at the University of Delaware, failure to meet the goals of the Program violates the University's policies. Therefore, the Greek Life office and the Greek student governing boards have the authority to enforce the sanctions associated with the *Five Star Chapter Evaluation Program*. Chapters that do not cooperate with the Program are subject to judicial board review and sanctions. The judicial board can issue a variety of sanctioning efforts ranging from requiring an improvement plan to revoking University recognition of the chapter's charter, which essentially would close the chapter (N. Hart, personal communication, September 30, 1998).

Student input through InterFraternity and Panhellenic Councils also was essential in developing the program. A two-semester warning and education period was instituted to allow chapters to adjust to the new standards for evaluation before sanctions and restrictions were imposed. Mid-term assessments without sanctions also are provided to help chapters identify areas of improvement (N. Hart, personal communication, September 30, 1998).

Due to the fact that chapters report their own results which are verified by the Greek Life office, the chapters cannot sabotage each other by providing information that would ruin another chapter's status. This is a non-competitive system based on self-reporting, which helps the chapters focus on all positive aspects of Greek life, rather than simply focusing on avoiding judicial sanctions. The system allows each chapter to reach its fullest potential, while maintaining positive relations between chapters (N. Hart, personal communication, September 30, 1998).

Evaluation

With increased media attention on Greek organizations, many colleges and universities are struggling to find the rationale to keep Greek organizations on their campuses. Why would any university, like the University of Delaware, invest the time and effort to be supportive of organizations viewed in such low esteem by many in the higher education community? The Office of the Vice President of Student Affairs at the University of Maryland at College Park (1995) has adopted a relationship statement, illustrating the benefit Greek organizations can and should have on an educational environment. The following is a portion of the statement between the University and Greek organizations suggesting the benefits of being involved in healthy Greek organizations.

The document recently developed by the American College Personnel Association, *The Student Learning Imperative: Implications for Student Affairs* (1994) states that the "Hallmarks of a college-educated person include: ...(b) an ability to apply knowledge to practical problems encountered in one's vocation, family, or other areas of life; (c) an understanding and appreciation of human differences; (d) practical competence skills

(e.g. decision making, conflict resolution); and (e) a coherent integrated sense of identity, self-esteem, confidence, integrity, aesthetic sensibilities, and civic responsibility.” Given the intensity of daily life and the range of developmental challenges that exist in a college setting, fraternities and sororities remain perhaps the most productive living-learning experiences available to students that will allow them to achieve these competencies. (p. 1)

The *Five Star Chapter Evaluation Program* is an excellent tool that can help institutions mold their Greek systems into a vital part of how the college or university meets the goals of the *Student Learning Imperative*. The Program is designed to provide incentive for students to take a leadership role and initiate changes benefiting the chapter and all of its members. Greek organizations that meet the challenge and goals of the Program, not only will be better able to be an integral part of the University’s educational mission, but also are more likely to meet the organization’s self professed core values and beliefs.

This system certainly has worked for the University of Delaware and a select other institutions that have implemented similar programs. However, this is not a cure all for any Greek system. The program must be tailored to the specific institution if it is to be successful. Colleges and universities must independently define the criteria of the program to reflect the culture and values of the institution and its students. In an ideal situation, the program helps each Greek organization act in harmony with the institution’s values and the organizations specific core values. Institution-wide support, such as approval by the Faculty Senate at the University of Delaware, is critical in making the program enforceable, as well.

Student input in the development and implementation of the program is critical in order for it to be successful. Without student support, the program will simply suffocate and punish organizations. Including the students in the development of the program helps to insure that their views of appropriate challenges and goals are included. This partnership will allow for the students to promote the program to other students, avoiding the appearance of another administrative mandate.

Once the program has been properly developed with students to reflect the appropriate values, it is critical to allow students time to adjust to a new method of chapter evaluation. A two-semester phase-in, similar to the University of Delaware's, would be appropriate. After a full year of students and administration working in partnership to develop and organize the program, a yearlong trial period could be implemented. Fraternities would be asked to report information verifying that they had met the goals of the program. After each semester, the chapters would receive a progress report with their five star status. This would not carry with it any of the privileges or sanctions. During this period the university could work with the chapters to help them reach their goals, avoid sanctions, and become a healthy organization for student involvement. Keeping these factors in mind, colleges and universities can use the *Five Star Chapter Evaluation Program* to help all chapters achieve success meeting the goals of the organization and the university.

Conclusion

If colleges and universities are indeed looking to educate and improve Greek chapters, rather than disassociate with and eventually eliminate Greek organizations from their campuses, programs like the *Five Star Chapter Evaluation Program* could be used

as a successful tool to help reach their goals. Universities should include their own institutional values and help the chapters adjust to new programs, in order to provide chapters with the instrument to be successful. With such tools, Greek organizations can return to their original values of building meaningful personal relationships, scholarship, community service, leadership, and involvement. This return to fraternal core values can help Greek organizations once again become an integral part of college and universities educational missions.

References

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