

Academic Achievement

While our members must take personal responsibility for their scholastic performance just like they should take personal responsibility for all of their behavior their scholastic achievement is still the rightful concern of the chapter. The group can and will have a powerful effect on the individual and, therefore, his grades.

Typically, the following are some of the statements heard at chapters that do not promote scholarship and make excuses for poor performance:

“Grades are an individual thing.”

“We’re a SOCIAL fraternity!”

“We were really involved; that’s why our GPA is low.”

“We need to start pledging smarter people and that will solve our problem.”

“We have special manpower needs; we can’t turn down a ‘good guy’ just because he is a marginal student.”

“Image = parties + intramurals.”

One can often generally estimate the grades of a chapter by looking at the attitude, as indicated by what the members say and the “academic atmosphere” of the group. A chapter that has a positive attitude toward scholastic achievement will have a written scholarship program that in-

cludes such items as a scholarship chairman and committee, quiet hours, awards for good grades as well as improvement, a tutoring program, a Faculty Advisor, a chapter library, computer rooms and academic goals for the entire chapter as well as its individual members. A chapter that does not promote academics will have few of these (or will have them in name only) and will be cheating its members out of their most important goal in college—their education.

Before a chapter (or an individual) can expect to improve its (his) grades, it (he) must be committed to a goal. The goal should be in writing: what the plan is (raise grades from ___ to ___) and how it will

happen (scholarship program). The goal must be realistic and progress towards it must be frequently evaluated. Establishing several intermediate goals that will lead up to the final goal is essential. Number of study hours per week, deadlines for measured progress on term papers and keeping up with weekly reading assignments are some examples. Establishing a reward system for achieving these intermediate goals is also a good idea. On both a chapter and individual level.

Developing a sound scholarship program and an attitude to support it is not something that can be done overnight. The chapter must commit itself to the program and view it as a long range and continuous process. Academic achievement must become a way of life for every member. The appointment of a scholarship chairman shows that this attitude is starting. Having a written scholarship program will show that the attitude is becoming more than just an idea and sticking to the program while continually updating it will give strength to that attitude.

It is not difficult to improve grades within a chapter. However, to do so, the chapter must know and live by a few rules. These rules are: (1) establish an atmosphere that values academic performance, (2) plan ahead; and (3) be dedicated. If a chapter follows these rules and uses the ideas set out in this program, it will learn

If members claim that they owe “everything” they are to Delta Chi, why do they claim it has nothing to do with their grades?

that it isn’t always necessary to study five times as long to do better. The key to good grades is to motivate and to make more effective use of the time devoted to studying. If the chapter plans its events in advance so that they do not interfere with academic efforts and has an attitude that is supportive of good grades, our members will learn this attitude and benefit from it.

The ideas and programs presented in this program are simply steps in the journey toward academic achievement. If a chapter wishes to begin that journey, we must develop and adopt a program and be dedicated to it.

SIX GUIDING PRINCIPLES

· Our fraternity must prove its value to its members and our university

Several recent studies show that Greek membership tends to help students stay in school, but hurts their grades. Faculty, parents, and high school senior have heard negative things about Greeks – alcohol, hazing, anti-academic mentalities. On most campuses the fraternity average is below the all-men’s average. Many colleges are adopting tough new standards for continued recognition of Greek chapters- a few are closing their Greek systems altogether!

· Being Greek and high standards go together

In this age of “political correctness,” the notion of “elitism” is under attack today in society and on college campuses. Some people believe elitism leads to unfair discrimination or favoritism toward those who already have advantages. We must shown by our actions, that elitism means selecting the best men on campus and then helping them more fully reach their potential and thus get the most out of college. Fraternities exist on campus today because they were founded on the principles of academic and personal excellence. We have our roots in literary, philosophical, and religious societies, and trace our lineage back to that group of students who founded Phi Beta Kappa- which is today one of the most prestigious collegiate honor societies. Fraternities should stand for excellence in education and in the development of self-confident, well-rounded men.

· Our chapter must create a caring, supportive and serious atmosphere

Many theories in education and in leadership start from the assumption that students and other people gather cues about what sort of behavior is expected of them in given situations, then respond accordingly. If a professor sets out high expectations and touch but fair standards at the beginning of the semester- and continues to uphold and reinforce those expectations throughout the class- most students will understand that they need to live up to that level. That concept applies within any reference group that an individual values.

· Quality in one area is linked to quality in others

What comes to mind when you think of the most impressive students you have known? Probably someone who not only gets good grades but also

looks out for his health and appearance. He does work on a timely basis, is prepared, and does not miss class. He is confident; assured; stable; takes on extra activities and excels in all areas of life. His clothes, room- everything projects the message: “This is a man who has his life together.” He is the kind of person people want to get to know, a role model, and a person people look to for leadership positions. The point is that someone who has his act together in one area of life – academics- is likely to have it together in other areas as well. The same discipline and self respect that motivates someone to get up a little earlier, eat and exercise properly, and keep a schedule also motivates them to study a little harder and achieve academically. These are the sorts of members we want to recruit. *It works the same way on the chapter level.* Experience shows that chapters with strong academic records tend to have less damage, better rush, higher levels of motivation and morale, and fewer risk-management problems. Work to improve chapter scholarship and we will see improvement in the other areas as well.

· Our chapter, like college, is preparing us for a balanced and successful life

Our chapter should help its members get more out of college. Fraternity shouldn’t compete with college, it should enrich the college experience by providing common goals, mutual support, special programs and assistance and brotherhood.

· Scholarship is practical

Internships and jobs are getting harder to get, and potential employers aren’t as impressed as they used to be with fraternity membership or leadership positions. A recent study showed that 70% of recruiters screen out job candidates with GPAs below 3.0 before the first interview. Our chapter wants to prepare men for a competitive career environment

ATTITUDE AND ATMOSPHERE

A positive attitude is the first and foremost requisite for scholastic achievement in any chapter. Scholarship teams, individual recognition, trophies and honors and “steak and bean” dinners are symptomatic of a chapter atmosphere in which there is respect for academic performance and a desire to excel. Anything that sends the message to the members and others who come in contact with the chapter that this chapter values academic achievement increases the probability of it being a reality.

The premise of an excellent scholarship program is that the program is not an island in and of itself. Rather, it is a component of the goals and programs

of the chapter. For instance, if a chapter develops an outstanding scholarship program on paper and also has a social program with little regard for the need to study or to attend classes, your efforts are in vain. The scholarship chairman must work collaboratively with other officers and chairmen to focus adequate attention on the scholarship program. Social and philanthropic events must not conflict with academic commitments (e.g., a party on Tuesday night when most students need to be studying or preparing for Wednesday classes).

After a chapter plan with the appropriate balance of interests has been developed one must examine the culture in the chapter to identify where you need to focus greater attention. Spend some time listening to what members talk about. What items are on display in the chapter house and bedrooms? What percentage of the budget is spent on scholarship vs. social? Who are the "heroes" in the chapter and are they the excellent students or the best partiers? What traditions or rituals are most talked about and important to the chapter? What symbols represent the chapter and to what ends do they lead? These are the kinds of questions one needs to ask in order to determine what kind of culture exists in the chapter and then to develop a direction for change.

In order to develop a better academic culture or attitude within the chapter, consider the following:

1. Do members of the group know how to succeed in academic, career, or leadership arenas? What "heroes" are there in the chapter or among the alumni who can serve as role models and help mentor members in success patterns? Identify successful people to serve as models and to help teach members skills on how to succeed. A Faculty Advisor can serve in such a role. He/she can be instrumental in creating an attitude and even an environment supportive of academic pursuits as well as providing a resource for academic skills.

2. If the "heroes" are of the destructive or disruptive type, identify those who portray the ideals that need to be emphasized instead. Talk a lot about that member who is on Mortar Board or who manages to achieve the Dean's List while working part-time and taking an active role in the chapter. Post a list of campus involvement and academic honors on the bulletin board. Transfer the "hero" status to that type of member so that younger members can see where the focus needs to be.

3. The chapter needs to have written, well-articulated criteria for the allocation of rewards. This is also true for recruitment/selection of new members and even the inactivation/social probation of current members who are not performing or behaving according to the chapter's standards. To say that a chapter only selects "quality" men is not enough. The criteria of what makes a man "quality" need to be spelled out. It is also imperative that the chapter is clear about what infractions will result in the discipline of members. The boundaries of acceptable behavior must also be spelled out.

4. The design of the chapter space also tells a lot about the culture. While it may not be possible to have a great deal of input into the structural design of the house, it is possible to have some say in how specific areas of the chapter space are used. Does the chapter have a study room? What percentage of the space is used for parties or social gatherings? Do the chapter officers have an office? Are there computers available for members to use?

5. Use significant events to help develop the culture or attitude that is needed. Make the scholarship banquet a nice tradition that people talk about. See if the Faculty Advisor can arrange to have the Vice President of Academic Affairs or even the University President speak. When members only talk about the "blowouts" and about who skips the most classes, the culture supports an anti-academic attitude. Develop events that promote the best ideals of the chapter, not the worst.

6. Get the members involved in the process of passing the culture on to future members. Make sure the associate member counselor has a good understanding of the kind of attitude the chapter needs to promote scholarship. He can then educate the associate members on the principles that need to be reinforced. Make sure the associate members' and the big brothers' academic performances are acceptable.

7. Get alumni and advisors involved in developing a strategy to promote the kind of attitude that best meets the chapter's needs. Alumni can serve as important role models to chapter leaders and members.

These ideas, suggestions and hints on developing a positive culture or attitude in the chapter should be put to use. Examine what currently exists and plot out a plan for the future that helps to promote a strong academic attitude in the chapter.