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Letters without labels

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LETTERS WITHOUT LABELS

CAMPUS GREEKS ARE TRYING TO CHANGE THE “FRAT GUY” IMAGE

Every year thousands of men join fraternity life. They become members of a special enclave that is centered around philanthropy, leadership and chubbie shorts. This exclusive club required a picking and probing process of PNM’s (potential new members) and casting out the ones that didn’t fit. It’s pricey for sure, but the rewards that come out of it can skyrocket you into your career.

BY ELIZABETH JACAVINO
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Every year thousands of men join fraternity life. They become members of a special enclave that is centered around philanthropy, leadership and chubbie shorts. This exclusive club required a picking and probing process of PNM’s (potential new members) and casting out the ones that didn’t fit. It’s pricey for sure, but the rewards that come out of it can skyrocket you into your career.

Campus Greeks are trying to change the “frat guy” image. According to USA Today, 85 percent of the CEOs of Fortune 500 companies and 80 percent of presidents since the 1900s were all members of fraternities. Another similarity reported by The Huffington Post is that 91 percent of the CEOs are white and all but one president has been white. Greek life has largely been viewed as a white person’s game, for elitists only. The whole process of recruitment is determining whether someone is good enough or not for that chapter. But what about the fraternities here at Iowa State? Here there are multicultural, National Pan-Hellenic, LGBTQ+ Greek organizations. Is Iowa State’s fraternity life more inclusive?

“It has definitely gotten a lot better than in previous years” says Andrew Mun, the president of Multicultural Greek Council (MGC).

There are four Greek councils that are included in the Office of Greek Affairs: Interfraternity Council (IFC), Collegiate Panhellenic Council (CPC), National Pan-hellenic Council (NPHC) and Multicultural Greek Council (MGC). Total membership of these councils is slightly over 4,300 members. This makes up 15 percent of the population of students at Iowa State University.

In fall of 2014, the percentages of members in Greek life was 84 percent caucasian and 16 percent minority. That same semester, Iowa State University reported that the undergraduate population was 88 percent white and 12 percent of students are considered minorities. Billy Boulden, Director of Greek Affairs, says that the data suggests a very comparative number to the population of Iowa State. In fact, the fall 2014 Greek life was only 1 or 2 percentages different of total population (except for the international student population). Boulden also says that the Greek life on campus is growing faster than the university is.

Iowa State implemented the Office of Diversity and Inclusion after a study showed the lack of such on campus. The Office of Greek Affairs has also begun to take steps towards providing a more diverse environment, one being that they want to create a diversity committee to further explore any problems the Greek community has.

Last year the Office of Greek Affairs instituted a new pillar to the member’s values. The new pillar, social justice, is focused on “the promotion of change through challenging inequalities and embracing diversity”. This pillar came with the new strategic five-year plan. The plan was assembled from issues that were presented to Boulden. To discover what was needed to change, members of Greek Affairs sent out thousands of emails to everyone and anyone. Boulden says they sent out emails to everyone they had an email for: community members, alumni, current Greek members and non-Greeks.

There is an award given out each year that showcases the chapter that best represents the Greek community and their five pillars. This includes the social justice pillar. The criteria for the Fraternal Award of Excellence includes meeting social justice standards — a documented program that educates the members on topics such as gender issues, sexual orientation, religion and race and ethnicity.
There must be documentation that proves the chapter has demonstrated awareness about multiculturalism, diversity and diverse populations. Also, chapters need to have documentation of diversity teaching in new member programs. These are just some of the requirements to compete for this award.

Of course this is not a standard for each chapter just a requirement for the award, but Nic Stumbo, President of Interfraternal Council (IFC), sees it as an incentive and bar that each chapter is holding itself to.

Stumbo says that the organization has changed. He explained that he wants to get away from the stereotypes from the 80s and 90s. For example, IFC has changed the way events are hosted and themed. Members now have to get approval from IFC’s VP Risk Prevention for an event and the theme of the event. The theme is specifically looked at to make sure that there is no cultural appropriation. IFC is also teaming up with multiple organizations in November to promote men’s mental and physical health awareness including: ACCESS, LGTBQSS, Margaret Sloss and others. There will specifically be a discussion about toxic masculinity during November.

However, not everyone seems to think the lack of diversity has been addressed. Jacob Anderson*, a fraternity man, says he thinks that the conversation on diversity is awkward to have. He says that since the two biggest councils are predominately white “it’s just really uncomfortable for that large of a [white] group to discuss diversity...when the topic of diversity comes up they don’t want to cross any lines so it’s very difficult to have those conversations.”

There are steps being taken that are trying to improve diversity and inclusion in fraternities and Greek organizations as a whole, but does that mean it is a welcoming community?

It really depends. Nick Hoffman, a non-Greek, says the community was welcoming and willing to assist in anyway possible, and that he’s met some really nice guys; however, “they seem somewhat exclusive when it comes to their parties and other events. I feel that if you want access to anything Greek that is not a fundraiser, you’ll have to be Greek yourself.”

Frances Clark, a non-Greek, furthered. When talking about Greek life, the first thing she thought of was the parties — that there is an exclusive, Greek only, attitude when it comes to partying. Clark says that the party scene is heavily controlled by the fraternities. Kathy Kart* says she was not allowed into a party, even though she was with members of the fraternity because there were too many non-Greek guys in her group. She added that she was with new members that were more welcoming, but the older ones were stricter with the type of person that is allowed in. Another student saw two bouncers of a fraternity party not allow a group of girls in because one was “too fat”.

“It’s easy to forget that these organizations were founded on moralistic values. It’s about caring for each other as human beings”, says Mun.

Many members join for the morals and values that certain fraternities have. Some join because of the leadership opportunities.

When Anderson joined his IFC fraternity, he immediately took a leadership position and has since held multiple chairs. Anderson is also a gay African American man.

“IT’S REALLY DIFFICULT TO TALK ABOUT [BEING GAY]...IT’S EASIER ONCE YOU AND YOUR BROTHERS BECOME CLOSER. I DIDN’T GET A LOT OF JUDGEMENT FROM THE GUYS [FROM MY FRATERNITY].”

There is a part of the Greek world that does not get highlighted. Clark was not aware that they existed. Stumbo didn’t know about these organizations when he joined. It’s the two multicultural councils: NPHC and MGC.

These two other parts of Greek life haven’t exactly always had a relationship with the two major councils, but Mun knew it was a necessity to bridge the gap between the four councils. He focused his time as president unifying MGC so they would better be able to work with the other councils, but it is going to take time to really build that relationship. The council presidents meet once a week now, which is a start down a path to better unite the Greek community as a whole.

But there isn’t that much involvement with the general members. The presidents of the four councils are well informed and involved, but the regular population isn’t as much. This could be due to the fact that the relationship is new and only just now solidifying and the “top-down” approach has not yet reached the general members.

“There’s always been dialogue about it...[we] need to be more included with each other’s events,” says Noah Kilnozo, president of Omega Psi Phi (a historically African American fraternity). “A lot of times it’s just about finding out where stuff is because I don’t know where any of the events are that CPC or IFC has thrown.”

Anderson says that the chapter leaders are excited about this budding connection with the other councils, but the general members aren’t and that is something to focus on.

“Historically we have left it up to NPHC and MGC to invite us to events. We need to reach out to them and say ‘Hey we are having this event and we would love to have your council represented at our event’” says Anderson.

Stumbo added, “You’re seeing a lot more social events happening across council...
we’re getting to get to work a little bit more creating events instead of just inviting each other to events”.

Anderson also noted a recruitment issue. He says that there is sometimes an expectation that just because someone is African American or gay etc that says person would only be interested in that corresponding organization.

“I just think that [there needs to be] a tackling of assumptions by people who are recruiting or want to be recruited by fraternities or sororities…just because this is your race or this is your ethnicity doesn’t mean you have to join those organizations that are historically that way”. He says that it was all based on morals and values, and that is what should matter. It’s all about where someone feels comfortable.

Another reason people join fraternities is because they wanted to join a group whose members have similar identities and life experiences. But that is part of the reason that the four councils haven’t always had that great of connections.

Kilnozo says that there needs to be an “[encouragement] with people in our chapters to be more open minded, more adventurous to get to know somebody who doesn’t look like you or who grew up in the same type of environment”.

While there are steps being taken to be inclusive, the Greek community still has a long way to go, and not everyone is going to feel included, Mun noted.

Hoffman says that there wasn’t going to be an organization that 100 percent represented Iowa State’s campus because of how diverse it is.

Breaking the labels between communities is important, though. Mun says, “What it comes down to is us understanding our values as a community and as members of Greek organizations...