

Report III

Senate Task Force for Excellence in Equity, Inclusion, and Citizenship

ENTERING A NEW ERA: COMING TOGETHER TO ACHIEVE A GREEK SYSTEM WITH SUSTAINABLE DIVERSITY

The failure of qualified African American students to receive invitations to join traditionally White sororities during Fall 2013 rush is anathema to everything for which The University of Alabama stands. The veracity of this statement and true values of the University, in turn, are reflected in the University's response to Fall 2013 rush. Within three weeks, through the tireless efforts of President Judith Bonner and her staff, UA was able to achieve the most racially and ethnically diverse sorority system in the South. The Task Force applauds the accomplishments of President Bonner, her administration, the personnel in Student Affairs, and the team in the Office of Greek Affairs (see Appendix A). Task Force members are also pleased to learn what the Greek Councils are doing to bring about a more inclusive and equitable Greek system at UA (see Appendix A). In investigating the actions taken in the aftermath of Fall 2013 Panhellenic rush, we cannot help but conclude that we have begun a new era of inclusivity in the history of the Greek system at UA.

However, consistent with the desires of President Bonner and the Faculty Senate for *systemic* change, members of the Task Force are recommending policies, structures, and practices that will build on the accomplishment of 2014 and sustain racially and ethnically diverse Greek chapters over time. What follows are 19 recommendations to help facilitate a lasting integration of the Greek system at UA. Arriving at these recommendations would have been impossible without the unselfish giving of time and thoughtful input from Vice President, Mark Nelson, the Interfraternity Council Officers, the Panhellenic Officers, the Office of Greek Affairs under the leadership of Kathleen Gillan, and especially the Dean of Students, Tim Hebson. To these people we owe a special debt of gratitude, as we do to President Bonner for providing the leadership, hard work, and inspiration that has brought about this new era of inclusivity in the Greek system at UA.

New Policies

- A. **Enact a New Student Code of Conduct Rule Prohibiting Organizations from Socially Boycotting Other Organizations that Racially Integrate.** Clarify that this is an egregious violation, that it applies to Greek organizations, and that it will be met with serious sanctions likely including, but not limited to, loss of social privileges for an extended period of time, including being banned from having social functions on campus and/or forfeiting block seating privileges at University athletic events.

- B. **Require an Explanation and Activate an Alternative Selection Rule When Arbitrary Discrimination Occurs.** Various Greek houses have selection practices that allow a committee to determine who will receive an invitation to join, while others allow a small number of negative votes to deny a person an invitation to join. When a selection committee or small number of negative votes are suspected of being motivated by prejudice, we recommend, as policy and principle, that the broader chapter be entitled to an explanation as to why a minority was denied membership. We further recommend the activation of an alternative selection process or rule that removes the selection decision from these

individuals, *including chapter advisors and alumni*. For example, an alternative policy might allow prejudicial decision making to be overridden by a majority or supermajority vote of the membership.¹

- C. Implement Clear, Reasonable Diversity Criteria and Tract the Progress of Individual Greek Houses.** We recommend that the Greek Excellence Program maintain accurate annual records of the racial and ethnic composition of individual Greek Houses. Progress in becoming diverse must be acknowledged and rewarded; whereas failure to make progress within reasonable timeframes must also be addressed with corrective measures. The goal of the individual Greek houses, over time, should be to achieve a chapter membership that reflects the proportion of minority students at UA who are interested in the Greek system and have the means to participate. The criteria for making progress, however, should consider, not just outcomes, but also genuine efforts to diversify Greek houses that are competing for a limited number of students initially interested in crossing racial barriers.
- D. Continue to Develop Resources for Alumni Recommendations, and Conscientiously Contact and Tract Minority Rushees to Help Ensure that They Have Needed Alumni Recommendations.** As a symptom of segregation, many minorities will not know sorority alumni who can write them recommendations for membership in predominantly White sororities. We recommend that Greek Affairs personnel continue to develop their inventory of alumni willing to write sorority recommendations and to conscientiously contact and tract minority rushees in order to help ensure that they have needed alumni recommendations in a timely manner.
- 1. If Necessary, Loosen or Forgo Alumni Recommendation Requirements for Minorities Who Otherwise Meet a Sorority's Selection Criteria.**
- E. Neutralize the Effects of Legacy Preference in Evaluating Minority Rushees.** Since there are no African Americans who are legacies of the White Greek system at UA, we recommend the prohibition of allowing a sorority legacy to receive a bid over a minority rushee evaluated as being more qualified based on the standards of the sorority.²

New Structures

- F. Appeal to the National Greek Umbrella Organizations to Develop a Unified System of Rush.** The recruitment processes of the Greek organizations at UA reflect of the policies and customs of the national umbrella organizations—Panhellenic, Interfraternity Council (IFC), and National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC). We recommend that UA officials appeal to these organizations to work together to form a unified, or common, system of rush so that students curious about the Greek system at UA are not forced to choose between recruitment systems that are predominated by one race or another.

¹ Our investigation indicates that most Greeks are receptive to racial integration. Even a supermajority vote-- two-thirds or three-quarters vote--would likely nullify the actions of a committee or small number of racially biased members, advisors, or alumni.

² Given the large number of legacies that currently go through rush, legacy preference is currently not a problem in most Greek organizations. However, this rule should be in place for the few houses exercising legacy preference and for future reference.

- G. Charter New Greek Organizations Predicated on Affordability, Diverse Charter Members, and a Commitment to Inclusivity.** One of the barriers to a more inclusive Greek system is the expense associated with being in a fraternity or sorority. Consistent with the concept of public education being affordable and inclusive, criteria for new Greek organizations should be affordability, diverse charter members, and a commitment to inclusivity.
- H. Supplement the Current Systems of Rush with Unified Rush Functions.** The Task Force members support the idea of a unified Greek system with a common system of rush for all of the Greek Councils. However, without the unification of the national Greek organizations, fraternities and sororities associated with NPHC, Panhellenic, and IFC remain very attached to their current system of new-member intake that occur at different times of the year. Until the national Greek umbrella organizations unify their systems of rush, we recommend supplementing the current rush systems with unified rush activities that expose rushees to both the predominantly African American and White fraternities and sororities. The Task Force discussed various approaches to unified rush—Greek preview day, a Greek convocations, an open-house week, etc.—and ultimately felt that Greek Affairs and the members of the Greek system were in the best position to determine the most effective unified rush functions. Moreover, we are pleased to see that the IFC is already initiating activities in this direction (see Appendix A). To move in the direction of a unified Greek system *in general*, the Task Force members recommend functions and activities in addition to supplemental unified rush that bring together NPHC, Panhellenic, IFC, and UGC members.
- I. Work with NPHC Greek Organizations in the Development of Strategic Plans to Build Houses on Par with the Traditional White Greek Houses.** The difference in the size and quality of the traditionally White versus African American Greek houses are substantial and reinforce images of the South that are inconsistent with the values of our University. We recommend that Financial Affairs, Greek Affairs, and University Advancement work with NPHC organizations in the development of strategic plans to achieve greater parity in Greek housing. These units are in a position to help determine financial obligations, membership goals, and fundraising needs and opportunities for achieving parity. We were pleased to learn that Greek Affairs makes a conscientious effort to reach out to NPHC Greek fraternities and sororities when new land and facilities become available for Greek housing, and we encourage the continuation of this practice. Among other benefits, greater parity in Greek housing should help facilitate the racial integration of NPHC Greek houses.
- J. Establish a University Standing Committee on Greek Affairs.** To help oversee and support the Greek system, we recommend that the Administration follow a precedence set by other Universities (e.g., Auburn) to form a standing committee that addresses Greek Affairs. We further recommend that the Committee include representatives from relevant student affairs offices, the faculty, students in fraternities and sororities associated with each of the Greek Councils (IFC, NPHC, Panhellenic, UGC), alumni, and non-Greek students.
- K. Develop a More Structured and Active Communication Network for Chapter Advisors.** Some of the failure of sororities to pledge diverse members during the Fall of 2013 has been attributed to the role and power of sorority advisors. Beyond our recommendation to override any prejudicial behavior of an advisor (see recommendation B), we recommend the

development of a communication network that keeps advisors to fraternities and sororities associated with all of the Greek councils regularly informed of University policies and expectations regarding the Greek system. Given the different forms of rush (formal, informal, continuous open bidding, etc.) and different schedules for rush, we recommend that prior to *every semester*—Fall, Spring, and Summer—this network should be utilized to inform advisors of policies and expectations that will ensure fair membership selections.

- L. **Expand the Size of the Office of Greek Affairs.** With a Greek system that has more than doubled in size over the last 10 years, we recommend commensurate growth in the size of the professional staff—particularly individuals with training in student development and higher education administration—working in Greek affairs. If financial or political support is not available to expand the Greek Affairs staff, we recommend investigating the possibility of the Greek system providing the financial means for growing the Greek Affairs staff.

New Practices

- M. **Outreach to Underrepresented Groups and Convey a Consistent, Welcoming Message Across Different Campus Socialization Activities.** We recommend that the Greek Councils outreach to diverse students to inform them that the Greek system values diversity and that the recruitment and selection processes of Panhellenic, IFC, NPHC, and UGC Greek organizations are open to *all* members of the student body. We recommend that individual Greek organizations also conscientiously outreach to students from underrepresented groups who meet their membership criteria. Campus socialization experiences—student recruitment, freshmen orientation, the First-year Experience, rush orientation, etc.—should also convey consistently that the Greek system at UA welcomes diversity and that the recruitment and selection processes of the different Greek Councils are open to *all* members of the student body.

- N. **Three Years from Now, Move Sorority Rush and Fraternity Bidding to Spring Semester or the Winter Holiday Break.** To encourage socialization to the University, first, as well as broader exposure to Greek houses and to the tremendous diversity of organizations on campus, six Task Force members recommend that Panhellenic rush occur during Spring semester or over the Winter holiday break (before classes begin). They further recommend that the bidding processes of IFC affiliated fraternities occur during Spring semester or no sooner than the Winter holiday break. This timeframe ensures that the students interested in joining Greek organizations have already made their grades and reduces the need for fraternities to rush students while they are still in high school. This change also aligns Panhellenic, IFC, and NPHC recruitment functions at a more common timeframe, thus taking a step in the direction of a unified system of rush. To give the Greeks time to prepare for the semester's loss of income due to moving rush, we recommend that the transition to Spring or Winter holiday-break rush occur three years from now. Models for Spring rush can be found at universities such as Tulane, Indiana, Ohio State, and Vanderbilt.

Three of the Task Force members expressed opposition to Spring Rush on the basis of two primary concerns: (1) students experiencing undue pressure from being rushed all Fall semester, and (2) the likelihood of legal problems stemming from requiring the Greeks to admit new members in the Spring semester while allowing other campus organizations to admit new members during Fall semester.

O. **Continue to Grow and Expand Diversity Programs and Multi-Racial Activities.** We recommend the continued development of programs, experiences, sustained dialogues, and activities that expose Greeks to diversity issues and involve Greeks in multi-racial and other cross-cultural activities. We specifically recommend that the University:

1. Reinstitute the Greek Emerging Leaders Course that So Effectively Exposed Greeks to Campus Concerns about Diversity and Inclusivity.

P. **Involve Faculty and Reward Faculty for Involvement in the Greek System.** Through its faculty, the University employs the professional expertise capable of solving many of the problems that UA might face. We recommend that faculty go beyond their admonitions to desegregate the Greek system to become part of the team to help bring about the changes necessary for desegregating the Greek system. We further encourage the administration to call on and reward the faculty experts for becoming involved in this important cause.

Q. **Endow Scholarships for Students Interested in Crossing Racial Barriers but Cannot Afford to Join the Greek System.** We encourage Greek alumni to endow scholarships that would allow students to afford the expense of membership in their Greek organization for an *entire four years*.

Appendix A

DIVERSITY ACTIVITIES AND INITIATIVES OF THE GREEK SYSTEM DURING THE 2013-2014 ACADEMIC YEAR (from the Office of Greek Affairs)

On the Friday of Fall formal recruitment week in August 2013, President Bonner and members of the Administration met with the Office of Greek Affairs to begin exploring real and perceived barriers to the immediate and long-term diversification of the UA Greek community.

Meetings were held immediately with the Panhellenic presidents, the Panhellenic chapter advisors and National Panhellenic headquarters representatives. As a result of these meetings and other discussions, a way forward was developed and implemented.

On Sunday, Sept. 15, in a meeting with local chapter advisors, President Bonner took the unprecedented step of implementing Continuous Open Bidding (COB) for every Panhellenic chapter, starting immediately. Over the next few weeks, the President met with the presidents and chapter advisors for IFC, UGC and NPHC to discuss her vision and objective of ensuring a welcoming and inclusive campus characterized by access and opportunity. She informed them that she expected all Greek councils to follow in the footsteps of the Panhellenic sororities by reaching out to a diverse group of prospective new members.

All sororities participated in COB throughout the academic year. As a result, 15 of 18 Panhellenic sororities now have African American women as members. Every sorority already had minorities. Based on the Spring census numbers, the number of Panhellenic members who identify themselves as ethnic or racial minority is 320, including 21 African American women.

Alabama Panhellenic Association Activities

On Monday, Sept. 16, 2013, following the meeting with President Bonner, the Alabama Panhellenic Association began taking the steps necessary to implement COB. They unanimously voted to raise Chapter Total to 360, allowing all Panhellenic sororities to participate in Fall COB as well as Spring COB.

To ensure ongoing progress, the Alabama Panhellenic Association is collaborating with the Community Crossroads Center to offer a *Sustained Dialogue* group for Greek members in Fall 2014 in which students can earn course credit.

The Alabama Panhellenic Association, in conjunction with the Office of Greek Affairs, is requesting that any sorority that participates in fall formal recruitment have a staff member or national volunteer from their inter/national headquarters on-site August 9-16, 2014, during the formal recruitment process, to insure that the integrity of the chapter's membership selection process is maintained.

A commitment to diversity statement was developed by the UA Panhellenic to include in all recruitment publications and PR materials. *The Alabama Panhellenic Association desires to build a community that reflects diversity and inclusion within our sorority chapters. We strive to make our campus stronger through our commitment to promoting diversity and creating positive change within the Greek community. Women of all backgrounds make up the Alabama*

Panhellenic Association and each individual is celebrated for her perspectives, ideas and contributions to her organization and to our entire community.

Interfraternity Council Activities

The 28 Interfraternity Council (IFC) Presidents issued a statement, in the Fall, commending the Alabama Panhellenic Association (APA) sororities on their efforts to further diversify the UA Greek community and agreeing as a council to “create an environment that is open and accepting to all members of the Capstone community, regardless of background or ethnicity.”

For Fall 2014, the Alabama Interfraternity Council will be hosting "IFC Open House" rounds to begin on Sunday August 17th. Sunday's activities will be an IFC Meet and Greet with chapter representatives. Students interested in joining a fraternity will have the option to attend chapter specific recruitment events August 18th until the first day of fall classes on August 20th.

Office of Greek Affairs:

The Office of Greek Affairs is partnering with University Relations to create an All-Greek publication, highlighting all four governing councils, which will be available to all incoming students.

At the 2014 Greek Leadership Summit (GLS), chapter and council leadership participated in large group and small group sessions, both of which provided an opportunity to discuss issues of diversity.

As part of the 2014 Greek Excellence Award criteria, the Office of Greek Affairs added a Commitment to Diversity Award, which recognizes chapter specific diversity education and programming.