

CSENATE AD HOC COMMITTEE PROGRESS REPORT ON TASK FORCE REPORT III AND IV PRIORITIES

Overall Committee Activity

The Ad Hoc Committee met 10 times during the 2015-16 school year, for at least one hour per session, sometimes up to two hours. Members of the Ad Hoc Committee met in smaller groups or on individual basis with members of UA's administration (e.g. VPSA, David Grady), staff (e.g. Dean of Students, Tim Hebson), faculty, and students to collect information. Ultimately, over two dozen documents were created or collected by the committee and uploaded into a UABox folder for common access.

Task Force Report III.

Report III dominated our time and energy during the school year. Extensive data collection was undertaken by committee members to document the demographic makeup in each Greek organization at UA, their local and national policies relating to nondiscrimination, their faculty advisors, etc. Past diversity reports or initiatives were also collected, as were research reports from peer institutions. Three sessions of the committee involved guest speakers from UA's Greek System, independent students, and staff members from the Office of Student Conduct. Our efforts culminated in an exchange of reports in Feb-March 2016 with the Office of Fraternity & Sorority Life (OFSL) regarding responses to Task Force Report III. The final judgment of the Ad Hoc Committee is that, while some priorities stated in the report have been addressed or resolved, numerous important recommendations remain either under review or entirely unaddressed. We hope that the Senate can continue to work with the OFSL, Dean of Students, and Vice President for Student Affairs to pursue policies and structures that will lead to a richly diverse and thriving Greek system at UA.

General Information Learned & Gathered

- Not all Greek organizations are registered with The SOURCE and the Office of Student Involvement that oversees all student organizations.
- At least four faculty advisors to fraternities are employed within the Dean of Students Office or OFSL. Conflict of interest may arise in disciplinary moments; however, a counterargument is that such advisors have maximum familiarity with policies and the Code of Student Conduct.
- Many faculty advisors are missing from the OFSL data, or have left the university, or, in one case, have passed away.
- SGA President Spillers and his administration initiated a new division dedicated to multicultural affairs. This division has units dedicated to race, sexual orientation, international students, and overall diversity/inclusion. The Ad Hoc Committee finds this to be an example of students leading the way for the central administration to follow. Future SGA governments are under no obligation to keep this division active.

Progress on Task Force III Recommendations

Vice President Grady requested that the Office of Fraternity and Sorority Life (OFSL) address the prioritized recommendations in Task Force Report III. He also invited our committee to respond to the OFSL's comments. Since our response has just been submitted to VP Grady, we do not

know what further actions he might or might not take with respect to the Senate's recommendations. The following presents the *current status* of Report III's recommendations.

I. RECOMMENDATION: Enact a new Student Code of Conduct rule prohibiting organizations from socially boycotting other organizations that racially integrate. REQUIRES FURTHER ACTION.

The OFSL feels that social boycotting is not a problem and that UA's statement on diversity handles this problem. Our committee feels that social boycotting is still a problem (threats during the 2015 Homecoming Queen election) and that an unambiguous policy in the Code of Student Conduct empowers sorority women, helps prevent further racial discrimination, and provides essential clarification needed to facilitate the adjudication of allegations of social boycotting. VP Grady is open to Dean Hebson and the leadership in the OFSL working with our Ad Hoc Committee on this recommendation and any other recommendations where we have differences. He feels that there should be compromises on both sides.

II. RECOMMENDATION: Implement clear, reasonable diversity criteria and track the progress of individual Greek houses through the collection of data. PARTIALLY IMPLEMENTED—REQUIRES FURTHER ACTION.

The University now gathers data on the diversity of Greek houses. However, the OFSL raised concerns over the difficulty of measuring diversity progress given the limited number of minorities interested in joining traditionally White Greek organizations. We are sympathetic to this concern and desire the gathering of additional data and information to ensure Greek houses are evaluated fairly. Though they might not yield immediate results, we support including the following criteria to determine diversity progress: (1) data on the number of minorities invited to and attending rush functions and (2) accounts of diversity-related programs and activities.

III. RECOMMENDATION: Require an explanation and activate an alternative selection rule when arbitrary discrimination occurs. REQUIRES FURTHER ACTION.

The OFSL contends that a designated Student Affairs representative resolves allegations of discrimination, as do inter/national headquarters. Our committee members believe that a provision in the Student Code of Conduct provides an unambiguous statement that enhances the power of the Office of Student Conduct to effectively address discrimination in selection. VP Grady is open to Dean Hebson and the leadership in the OFSL working with our Ad Hoc Committee to resolve our differences on this issue.

IV. RECOMMENDATION: Continue to develop resources for alumni recommendations, and conscientiously contact and track minority rushees to help ensure that they have needed alumni recommendations. If necessary, loosen or forego alumni recommendation requirements for minorities who otherwise meet a sorority's selection criteria. HALF IMPLEMENTED—REQUIRES FURTHER ACTION.

In 2015, Panhellenic added a generic, supplemental academic letter of recommendation from a teacher, guidance counselor, or principal who does not have to be a member of a

Greek organization. However, the OFSL claims that, because sorority rush begins before school starts, they do not know the minority status of rushees for the purpose of tracking their rush experience. The Ad Hoc Committee believes that the minority status of rushees could be easily collected on application forms or through the photos submitted by rushees. We believe that monitoring the rush experience of minorities provides a needed safety net to help ensure equal opportunity in selections. A standing committee on Greek affairs might help in this monitoring effort. VP Grady is open to Dean Hebson and the leadership in the OFSL working with our Ad Hoc Committee to resolve our differences on this issue.

V. RECOMMENDATION: Charter New Greek organizations predicated on affordability, diverse charter members, and a commitment to inclusivity. FURTHER INFORMATION IS NECESSARY FOR ASSESSMENT.

The OFSL provided information on new Greek organizations and reported that they are actively engaging multicultural and special-interest organizations about expansion opportunities at UA. However, the information provided did not address whether chartering new Greek organizations is predicated on affordability, diverse charter members, and a commitment to inclusivity.

VI. RECOMMENDATION: Neutralize the effects of legacy preference in evaluating minority rushees. REQUIRES FURTHER ACTION.

The OFSL contends that legacy preference is no longer a problem and that the University and Panhellenic do not have the authority to disregard inter/national membership policies. Our committee wants to prevent backsliding and believes neutralizing legacy preference reduces discrimination, empowers Greek women in membership selections, strengthens organizations through allowing them to select the most meritorious new members, and justifies Greeks refusing to pledge less qualified legacies when experiencing pressure from alumni. VP Grady is open to Dean Hebson and the leadership in the OFSL working with our Ad Hoc Committee to resolve our differences on this issue.

VII. RECOMMENDATION: Establish a University standing committee on Greek affairs. STILL BEING STUDIED (REQUIRES FURTHER ACTION).

OFSL research on similar committees on other campuses reveals mixed results. We feel the mixed results provide instrumental information for structuring an effective committee on Greek affairs at UA. Our committee supports this recommendation because it is designed to help advocate for an OFSL that is understaffed and under-supported.

VIII. RECOMMENDATION: Predicate University funding and lending for new Greek housing on the basis of diverse and affordable membership and a commitment to inclusivity. IMPLEMENTED—CLOSED.

We applaud the effort of the OFSL and Financial Affairs for adding diversity requirements to the *Student Organization Construction Project Guidelines*. Only one minor suggestion would be to place the diversity language before the financial language in the *Guidelines*.

Continued

PROGRESS REPORT ON TASK FORCE REPORT IV

General Information Learned and Gathered:

The Ad Hoc Committee heard and gathered extensive information on the existence and dynamics of Theta Nu Epsilon, commonly known as The Machine. This network of representative from powerful Greek houses definitely exists and exerts significant influence over campus voting practices. The precise level of power exerted by The Machine varies from year to year based on a mix of who is in the inner leadership circle, the mood or involvement of the member houses, and the strength and nature of opposition voices. Within the SGA Senate, the voting bloc controlled by The Machine is significant, well known, and can control legislative outcomes.

Our Ad Hoc Committee learned of a second “secret” group known as Argentum. It is unclear if this group is meant to mock The Machine or provide a similar source of prestige and exclusivity for students of different political persuasions. Our committee agreed that partisan secrecy is not a healthy practice in democratic societies.

Reactions to Task Force Report IV

Our Ad Hoc Committee met with the Director and Assistant Director of the Office of Student Conduct, Todd Borst and Kelli Knox-Hall, to address the changes to the Code of Student Conduct proposed in Report IV. We also met Vice President Grady to discuss action and attitudes toward the prioritized recommendations of Task Force Report IV.

The Office of Student Conduct (OSC).

Todd Borst and Kelli Knox-Hall invited our committee to submit to them the exact language from recommendations 1, 2, 3 that we wanted added to the Code of Student Conduct. They also invited us to indicate where we wanted the language to appear in the Code of Conduct. We provided them the language and suggested placement of the language and have been informed that it will be reviewed toward the end of the academic year.

Reactions from David Grady. Vice President Grady was open and interested in student education, which led to his email to all students on campus that provided instruction on (1) how to register to vote in Tuscaloosa, (2) residency requirements for voting in Tuscaloosa, and (3) how to obtain an absentee ballot. VP Grady, however, indicated that he does not like narrowly defined language in the Code of Student Conduct. He prefers broad language that allows for greater latitude in determining violations of the Code. We, in turn, consulted two attorneys—Bryan Fair and Charlye Adams—who both agree that specific language is needed in the Code of Conduct to address the problems idiosyncratic to our Greek system. The attorneys indicated that broad statements that cover all other unspecified violations can also be added to the Code of Conduct.

However, we have not yet been able to report to VP Grady that two attorneys found a way to address both the Senate’s recommendation and his concerns.

The recommendations and their current status are as follows:

- 1. Prohibit campus organizations from requiring students to produce evidence of voting or voting for specific candidates, referendums, or Constitutional amendments in local, state, or national elections. STATUS: ONGOING**

Toward the end of Spring semester 2016, the OCS will review our suggested language and placement of that language in the Code of Student Conduct.

- 2. Clarify in the Code of Student Conduct that the use of coercion or incentives of any physical value to induce students to vote or vote for specific candidates, referendums, or Constitutional amendments in local, state, or national elections is prohibited. STATUS: ONGOING**

Toward the end of Spring semester 2016, the OCS will review our suggested language and placement of that language in the Code of Student Conduct.

- 3. Prohibit campus organizations from punishing students who refuse to participate in local, state, or national elections. STATUS: ONGOING**

Toward the end of Spring semester 2016, the OCS will review our suggested language and placement of that language in the Code of Student Conduct.

- 4. Establish in the Code of Student Conduct that student conduct affiliated with a non-registered student organization can constitute violation of the Code of Student Conduct. (Clarify that students organized to affect elections and other political outcomes, including student groups representing Greeks or independent students, must register with Student Affairs and be supervised to meet and function on campus property). STATUS: ONGOING**

This recommendation was not directly addressed with relevant UA administrators.

- 5. Support Theta Nu Epsilon (The Machine) coming above ground. Call on Administration, influential/respected Greek alumni and student leaders to support this effort. If efforts to bring Theta Nu Epsilon above ground fail, work with the Greek umbrella organizations and sympathetic Greek houses to develop a new Greek political organization. STATUS: ONGOING**

- 6.**

In a one-on-one meeting, Dr. Baldwin was pleased to learn that VP Grady had been working with the Greeks, that progress has been made, and that the problems with the local school board election in 2013 would not recur. VP Grady is also open to Dean Hebson and the leadership in the OFSL working with our Ad Hoc Committee to resolve any differences on this issue.

- 7. Support administrative efforts to enforce Code of Student Conduct violations in areas of emerging challenge, such as local, state, or national elections. STATUS: ONGOING**

To help prevent the problems revealed in the 2013 local school board elections, VP Grady sent an email to all students on campus that provided instruction on (1) how to register to vote in Tuscaloosa, (2) residency requirements for voting in Tuscaloosa, and (3) how to obtain an absentee ballot.