

Alumni Relations

ALUMNI RELATIONS

Over the course of the 2013-2014 academic year, the Sigma Alpha chapter was able to overcome a great many obstacles. One area in which we improved significantly was Alumni Relations.

At the beginning of the year, our alumni had hardly an ounce of faith in us. Last year was a very rough year for the chapter, and our leadership (of which I was a part as treasurer) had let them down many times.

Things were terrible. I mean, really bad. Dan Johnson was always consistent in his leadership and optimism. However, some of the other alumni with which we interacted regularly, were very obviously losing interest in staying involved with the chapter due to our record of disappointment and disregard for proper conduct. Despite a few key figures working very hard to clean things up, the tone of the chapter was just in the dumps, and it was apparent that a fresh year/clean slate was needed to rebuild motivation and momentum.

During this period, the younger and rising future leaders of the fraternity (myself included) participated in informal brainstorming sessions about what to do over the course of the 2013-2014 year.

On the topic of alumni relations, there arose a great interest in hosting an event in the spring to celebrate the alumni and all that they do for us. These events had taken place in the past but had very poor marketing and minimal oversight/responsibility distribution to brothers for the day of the event. Alumni would simply walk in and have to find their own way around, hope a student would come up and introduce themselves, and entertain themselves until this happened.

This year we held a spring reunion and parents weekend (our first time incorporating and appreciating parents since my active membership in DKE – spring 2011 – present) on the weekend of April 24-26 (the VT spring football game). While alumni turnout was a less than we were expecting, the turnout in terms of parents was phenomenal.

The fall and spring pledge classes were the most heavily represented in terms of parent attendance (surely signifying a promising future) and after the event, we heard nothing but raving reviews. All in attendance were able to participate in the following:

- Tons of freshly cooked BBQ food thanks to the family of brother Garrett Lally (Spring '12). His father was on the grill all day. They also provided a great deal of higher end beers for people to enjoy.
- Badminton
- Deke memorabilia dating back to the 50s and 60s. We were able to scrounge up some old Deke photo albums thanks to Alumni Brothers Dan Johnson and Mickey Hayes.
- Deke articles from the Bugle and Virginia Tech Yearbook which Brother Beta 2014-2015 Kyle Blevins found through hours of research online.
- A heavy, but family friendly dose of jolly good fellowship.

Through reflection on the event in the chapter meeting immediately following the weekend event, we accomplished many things:

- Showing the alumni that we can organize our own events and follow through on what we say
- Providing transparency of who we are to the parents and giving them a way to come meet everyone and get involved.
- Raised a fair bit of money for the chapter house improvement project which is ongoing. More importantly than our short-term successes that came from the event, we learned many things which I hope will carry forward and turn into future successes:
- Marketing for events for a month or more beforehand makes a massive difference (alumni newsletters, personal invitations with parents names sent to homes via pony mail)
- Parents want a way to get involved. They love their kids, and want to contribute to the organizations of which they become a part. They also want to make sure these organizations are positive influences!
- In an organization of 20+ men, someone's dad is bound to be a badass cook. Find him and ask him to get involved! He'll have a great time, and it makes it easier on the brotherhood.
- Parents love the opportunity to network with alumni and other parents.
- Brothers thoroughly enjoy seeing where their brothers have come from.
- Parents don't like natural light beer.

Aside from our standard alumni football tailgates, this was the most profound event of the year.

During the course of the year, we also did a great deal of work to the house which I will discuss in greater detail in another section. However our relationship with the alumni was essential in this process, and strengthened through out the project.

As brothers Mark Lenzi, Ryan McMahon, David Marshall, Evan Miller and I worked on the house, communication with Dan Johnson, and Alumni Treasurer Mike Beam was essential. I would feel safe in presuming that those men would say we really wowed them with our work and enthusiasm.

Scholarship & Academics

Scholarship and Academics continued to improve this year as our new members were (generally speaking) very avid students. There is, of course, an exception of a few guys, with whom we have talked to and started to try and work on a program. Aside from these few, the rest of the nineteen guys who joined this year were very academically focused individuals.

Academics has been a problem for the Sigma Alpha dekes in recent years and will continue to improve so long as we keep our momentum. I would argue that our two biggest areas of difficulty as a chapter have been communication and balance. As we have continued to drastically improve the both of these, we have improved in all of the categories in this application.

Academics will be a serious focus for us moving forward. Because we aren't affiliated with the school IFC, we don't have a GPA for the fraternity. If I had to guess however, it would currently be around a 2.6-2.7. I'd like to see this rise to above a 3.0. Much above that I think would be slightly unfeasible. But I think 3.0 is attainable and realistic. The key boils down to culture and "monkey see -- monkey do." We are all very influenced by the culture of the fraternity. The more we move away from living like Belushi in Animal House and toward living like H.W. did back at Phi, the more we will influence each other to follow suit. I have certainly seen this shift since I became a Deke. I have good reason to believe it will continue.

Recruitment

Evan Miller changed the game for Sigma Alpha this year in terms of recruitment. If someone told me that we were going to pull nineteen amazing guys in this year coming off of a year of seven Fall pledges, and no Spring pledges, I'd have thought they were crazy. I had ambition in my heart, but I had no idea we would conquer so much. Evan was the most organized and punctual man alive during recruitment for both semesters. He, for the first time ever, had folders with flyers, calendars, and marketing pamphlets with Deke stickers marked with each pledges name typed. I've never seen such dedication. Because of that commitment and such profound effort by the rest of the guys, we had twenty-five people show up to closed rush. That is by FAR the most in my history with the Sigma Alpha chapter. We were able to reel in fourteen pledges to start the Fall semester pledge process. By the end of the pledge period, we were down to eleven, but I feel as though the eleven were the ones we wanted. I'm not sure that the three who left their pledge brothers were going to be able to give what the eleven who stayed have given since their initiation.

Armed with eleven new soldiers, we hit Spring rush looking for new blood. We pushed ourselves and walked away with eight top notch pledges, many of whom were at the Fall closed rush. All eight made it through the pledge process and became my brothers. This pledge class is one I am very particularly proud of. If you look to my answer for the risk management section, you will see notes on how two of the pledges in this pledge class exhibited conduct of profound maturity and ethics by coming to me about something very serious. They acted as gentleman throughout the entire endeavor and helped me settle it in the way it needed to be handled. I am very proud of them, and proud to be their brother. The rest of the pledge class is no different. They are all extremely upstanding gentleman -- truly a trophy of our progress in attracting better and more capable men as time chugs on.

Overall our membership grew by nineteen this year. At the beginning of the year we had twenty-five actives, and by the end, all movements included, we jumped up to thirty-eight actives. This represents a 52% increase in active membership despite losing four guys to graduation between December and May graduations.

Without a doubt this was one of our best years ever in terms of recruitment. We decided to try something new for next year and have two rising sophomores share the position of Rush Chairman. They are two of the best and brightest from this years additions and they are best friends. They have that glowing need to do good for the fraternity. I can see it in their eyes. Some days they may not want to get to work, but there is no way in hell they will let their brothers down.

New Member Education

Our new member education process remained the same as it has in past years. We never had trouble with our pledging process. In fact, I think it is one of the strongest aspects of our fraternity. When I joined and other areas were weak, ritual is what made me look past the weaknesses and start to believe in the notion of brotherhood. Many other brothers have said things along similar lines to me in conversation. Ritual brought them in, conversation amongst pledge brothers about a bright future gave them hope, and the refusal to leave your team behind kept them pledging during hard times. Once initiated, they emerge full of excitement, pride and eagerness to get involved.

I believe one of the most powerful things we did this year was to immediately throw newly initiated brothers into committees and projects. Many of them had ideas. Those ideas just needed to be heard, nourished and given the chance to manifest. Many of us on exec

remember being frustrated by feeling like we weren't allowed in when we were newer brothers. We wanted to help but didn't know how. This should never be the case.

We encouraged the brothers to join committees and start brainstorming, and that's exactly what they did. The benefits were immediately visible. For the fall, getting the new brothers immediately involved meant creating a recycling initiative. This initiative has led us to recycle tons of cans and bottles which otherwise would have ended up in the trash. I barely had anything to do with the creation of that initiative, nor did anyone else in exec. Brother Carlin Field pitched the idea and set it all up for execution. It's been running strong ever since. His pledge brothers saw his success and are no doubt motivated by it.

While the bulk of this text is covering what happens after initiation, it really exemplifies what we teach during the new member education. I think it's easier to show what it's created than to say how to do it. It's a bit hard to explain how to teach the guys to want to do good for the fraternity. The easiest way to put it is "monkey see -- monkey do." Some guys just come in with a burning desire to make Deke better. The other ones need some help. There's room for all of them. As long as exec is strong and working as a well-oiled and motivated machine, the rest of the fraternity will follow suit. When the fraternity is operating in that manner, then the pledges see that and say "ahhh, so this is the way things go." It sears into their brain that brothers work hard to make Deke better. That's just what you do. And so upon initiation, they do it.

In the past, pledges would see guys just getting drunk and doing what they want, always thinking about themselves over the organization. This led the majority of pledges to follow suit, and the few with burning desires to quickly rise to leadership, and then become demoralized.

I feel that we really have some momentum now in keeping this tradition of do-gooding going. Sigma Alpha is on fire.

Philanthropy/Community Service

This year we participated for the first time ever in the Movember philanthropy, raising a grand total of \$1201 dollars! Many mothers cried as their son's grew out terrible moustache's in the name of Men's Health. We made T-shirts and had many local businesses sponsor our cause. To name a few: Green's Restaurant, Greenhouse Boardship, PK's Bar and Grill, Mish Mish Arts Supplies, Etc. All of our sponsors for the event were found and secured solely by the efforts of brother William Adams. He really took the ball and ran with it. This played a great role in his image transformation over the course of the year and eventual election into the role of Vice President for the 2014-2015 academic year.

This April 2014 we participated again in the Run for Ryan philanthropy with the Delta Gamma sorority. In past years we were very sideline helpers in the organization of the event. However, this year we really took the reins as much as they would allow us to and made a great event even better.

Led by Philanthropy Chairman William Adams (2014-2015 income Vice President), we had brothers handing out flyers all over campus and during all hours of student activity the week of the philanthropy. The event itself was a huge hit. Over 150 people showed up. We never did learn what the final amount raised was (unfortunately the girl who headed it for the Delta Gamma's was very difficult to reach) but I imagine it was several thousand. That was the number in the past, and each year we've been helping it's gotten bigger. We look forward to participating again next year. We were able to confirm our participation for next year already.

Chapter Management Practices

Discussed throughout other sections:

Key bullets not discussed in other sections:

- 1) Weekly Meetings
- 2) Frequent committee meetings
- 3) Weekly Clean-Ups
- 4) Consistent housework -- "never satisfied" policy

Judicial Board Practices

The judicial board was created for the first time in my membership history this year for the Sigma Alpha Chapter.

It proved to be very effective. While, like most changes in a fraternity, much debate ensued about how it should function, ultimately we created and implemented a system that worked for us. It was comprised as follows:

If a member of the fraternity commits an act which one deems is worthy of judicial review, it is submitted to the President or Member At Large. If it is a serious act, it is to be presented to the entire fraternity. If it is not extremely serious, it remains silent to the general membership, but a judicial board is selected for the hearing. The board is made up of the following:

- President (non voting member of the board, unless name comes up through random name selector phone application)
- Member At Large (Also non-voting unless selected)
- 5 randomly selected active brothers (determined through phone application) -- this number may be less if President or Member at Large is selected as one of the five.

After the general meeting, these individuals stay to review the complaint. First, the Member At Large reads the complaint to the board. Then, the filer of the complaint makes a brief comment to the board about why he is filing the complaint and what offense he believes the defendant has committed. After this, the defendant explains his side of the story to the board. Each of these presentations are made individually.

After this, the judicial board discusses what they believe is the truth, and discusses an appropriate punishments. The punishments are intended to:

- 1) Demonstrate to the offender that a wrong has been done.
- 2) Demonstrate that this action will not be condoned by the fraternity.
- 3) Demonstrate to the fraternity that this behavior will not be tolerated.
- 4) Punish with a level of severity agreeing with the seriousness of the crime.
- 5) Be productive for the whole fraternity. The punishments should not be pointless or humiliating in nature. To ensure this doesn't happen, President and Member At Large are present during discussion.

Example Crime and Punishment this year:

Crime: Broke a couple wooden chairs while drunk. Completely disregarded all of new house work recently completed over winter break by brothers.

Punishment: Take trash over flow to the dump and replace the chairs, and apologize to the entire fraternity.

Going into next year I would like to see crime punishments more along the lines of the following:

Example:

Crime: Brother breaks glass bottles in the house.

Punishment: Brother must make a detailed 5-10 min presentation on recycling and its impact.

Also brother must start a recycling initiative for the fraternity and enlist people for its execution.

This system at times was disagreed with. But these disagreements generally came from those who had just committed a crime and received punishment. Overall I believe the system was appreciated and accepted.

Risk Management

Rohan Elwadh (Spring '12) was our Member at Large for the 2013-2014 academic year. As such, he was the head of risk management for the fraternity. While this position is certainly a bit different for us as an "off-IFC" fraternity, I would argue that it is the most important office role we have next to the presidency due to our desire to return to campus.

This year we had no arrests, no noise complaints, no unfriendly run-ins with school authority or the police and only one alcohol violation. While I'm aware the phrase "only one alcohol violation" suggests I don't see this as a serious problem, I feel that dropping from thirty-eight violations a few years prior to only one (on Aug. 30, 2013 -- the first social night of the entire year) is a major leap for the chapter. For the entire operational year as I see it, we had no lapses that I am aware of. Some of the elements of culture change are going to have to be more gradual than others. I feel like it is more than realistic for us to set our maximum at zero alcohol violations for this coming year. If we get one, we need to treat it as emergency and seriously restructure our priorities and what we are doing.

I am very pleased with how Rohan handled the risk management procedures for this year, and the record shows his success. The one violation we had ultimately served as the catalyst for the very productive dialogue between Doug Lanpher, Byron Hughes and I that took place in September. Two previously non-existent relationships arose out of that meeting. Doug and I had each started an open door policy relationship with Byron Hughes.

I don't mean to suggest that I am happy we received the violation notice because of these results. However, I mean to say that if there is one violation to end the tradition of alcohol violations, I'm not too displeased with this one being the notice on record.

We at no point this year encountered any scares of hazing or mistreatment of any members or pledges.

We did however experience one count of potentially sexual harassment of a girl who occasionally hangs out with us at the house. We'll call her Sarah for the sake of telling the story with a bit more respect than saying "the girl." The incident happened between a brother and Sarah on several different occasions, but never at the house. A pledge was the first to find out about the incident, and instead of reacting how he would have liked to (as he was very physically dominant relative to the brother accused, and very protective of Sarah), he came to

me and looked for a solution. We notified International immediately upon learning about the incident. It turns out Shae Agnew happened to be coming to town around that time. Shae, Sarah, two pledges, and I met to have dinner. After some light conversation, she shared her account of the story. I later heard Brother Cole's (the accused) side of the story. The two of course, didn't align.

After much debate, the fraternity followed the By-Laws processes to suspend brother cole for a semester. The school actually investigated the accusations made by Sarah and decided that no action should be taken by Cole. Our suspension was for the rest of the spring semester, pending decision by the school. He has the option to rejoin us in the Fall but I believe it is unlikely that he will.

Financial Management & Stability

Charlie Cubberly should be made a saint for his work this year as Treasurer of the Sigma Alpha Chapter. As Sarah Christensen knows, the Sigma Alpha chapter has struggled very much over the past several years in our Financial Relationship with the international organization. Over the course of this year, we far more effectively collected dues than we ever have in the past -- with the highest cost of dues in our history. Charlie budgeted all events for the semester and protected our account from frivolous spending. I have no doubt in my mind he acted with complete integrity and never took a nickel from the account. This has been a problem in the past with other officers in the Treasurer seat. We managed to do all that we wanted to do, and commit several hundred dollars toward each philanthropy we were working on, and our house renovation project.

We cleared all debt with international, and became far more efficient at collecting initiation and pledge fees for newly initiated members. Thanks to bluepay, we were able to collect upwards of 95-97% of our fees last I heard from Charlie.

Charlie is also to be the Treasurer for the 2014-2015 academic year, so this year also looks promising financially. The only challenge moving forward will be making sure he creates a system which is easily transferrable to the next treasurer.

Other

This section of the application may be the one in which I can easily write the most. Because Sigma Alpha is currently off-campus and not recognized by the Virginia Tech IFC, we can't operate in the manner in which many other DKE chapters operate. This provides a massive challenge for us. How to handle this situation, who we are as a fraternity, and where we want to be in 2, 5 and 10 years out are questions that we needed to answer this year as a group. I would argue that in past years we struggled to succeed in our goals because we had never made them uniform across all brothers. We never had the discussions about what it means to be a Delta Kappa Epsilon at Virginia Tech. We never talked about what we want our image and footprint at Virginia Tech to be. We stayed away from discussing what went wrong in the past because it was upsetting to think about. It was much easier to ignore these topics and party as hard as possible with the headlights off. We were going 100 MPH with no regrets, just hoping we weren't headed toward a tree.

CHAPTER TORCH

This year we conquered all of those things. We opened the year with dialogue about all of these topics. We created a group thesis on who we were and what it meant to be a part of our beloved fraternity. We looked back on our greatest days as a chapter in the 60s and 70s and tried to

figure out why they were so successful. While a great bit of this dialogue occurred in Exec Meetings and personal conversations outside of meetings, a large enough portion of the conversations occurred among all brothers in the chapter meetings that everyone had given their piece. We were then all in possession of this new vision of DKE. I believe this was one of the most essential components of the successes of the 2013-2014 year. Together we had lit a torch, and it would light our way toward a brighter chapter future.

LEADERSHIP RESPONSIBILITY

Another great area of success was the revamping of all officer roles. In the past, as Doug and I had discussed during one of his visits, the President was the all-responsible, glorified clerk of the chapter. He would start clean-ups before anyone else. He would organize every philanthropy, social event, and meeting the fraternity participated in. He rarely succeeded in delegating tasks to the appropriate officers.

This year, all the stars aligned and every officer took pride in his role. The year didn't start this way with a bang, but with Doug's advice and a month or two of hard work by Kyle Blevins, Charlie Cubberly, and I, all officers were proudly executing their responsibilities as intended by our constitution and bylaws. This turned my role from an overwhelming and demoralizing chore, into the cause of the most proud and cherished year of my life.

CHAPTER MORALE

Last year I was embarrassed to tell people I was a Deke at Virginia Tech. I was proud to be in the same organization of the many great men I've met in my lifetime, and the many who come before us. But I was ashamed of my chapter. When I walked around campus, I avoided wearing letters or telling girls I was in Deke because I knew they'd make assumptions about me and lose interest immediately. Many brothers felt this way. We never discussed it except with very close friends behind closed doors, but we all knew we felt this way. We loved each other, and had a brotherhood within our own bubble. But the outside world didn't see what we saw. We had yet to change that.

By the end of the year, we all rose to a point of wearing some form of letters or philanthropy shirt 20-50 percent of the time we're out and about! I'm not sure how many other brothers noted this transition but it one of the things of which I am most proud. We really kicked a great piece of our old reputation out the door. This occurred for all the reasons above and in other sections.

To summarize, we just got better at disagreeing. As the year went on, we accomplished more and more together. When we disagreed, it was no longer with the underlying mentality of "it's views like yours that make the fraternity have the reputation it wields today." To say such a thing in the past would be to put all of the shame and failure of the fraternity onto one's shoulders. But a few months into the semester, saying those same words would put all of its recent accomplishments on that same person's resume. As a result, we learned to disagree more peacefully (with of course momentary exceptions).

Because we became happier and happier with how things were, we became better at appreciating other people's points of views. We learned that most of the time, the answer is in the middle. Sometimes it's not. But usually, it is.

We also had PARAMOUNT improvements in our relationship with school administration. I had several meetings with Interim Director of Greek Life, Byron Hughes. He and I actually developed

a genuine friendship. He went from brushing us under the rug in disdain at the beginning of the year to accepting an invitation to meet all the brothers at the chapter house and speak with us at the year's end. The topic of discussion covered where to go moving forward.

He and I were able to split up serious conversation about the chapter with our own joyous stories of brotherhood within our respective fraternities. He taught me quite a bit about the power of ritual when utilized to its full potential. He always did so with the respect of a non-member of the DKE fraternity. He really appreciates the sanctity of every fraternity's practices. Yet, he wants to help in any way he can.

Due to comments made by the brothers before us, many of the actives expected not to like Byron. But, as I knew would happen, after the meeting at the chapter house many brothers made comments to me about how approachable he is and how much optimism he had instilled in them in terms of the DKE - Virginia Tech relationship moving forward. This is something only he could have provided authentically. Coming from the top of the IFC food chain, this meant a lot to the brothers and relit the torch in any places it may have fizzled out due to exhaustion and impatience.

Brother Beta Certification

Name (First & Last) Chapter and Institution

Joseph K Loss Sigma Alpha, Virginia Tech

- By checking this box, I certify that all information contained herein is true and correct to the best of my knowledge.