Chapter 1: The College Fraternity

“...we are all brothers, all men.”

Since the beginning of time it has been a universal desire for people to organize into small, selective groups, bringing together persons of like interests into an intimate social relationship. The college fraternity is an outgrowth of this desire. A fraternity man should know how and why the college fraternity came into being, the purposes which it serves today, and the aims and objectives to which it aspires. Fraternity alumni testify to the value of their fraternity experience.

“Fraternities and the fraternity system are a distinctive and praiseworthy feature of American college life. Both as a fraternity man and as an educator, I firmly believe in the value of fraternities when they are properly managed and under good leadership.” - Dr. Walter C. Langsam, Former President of the University of Cincinnati

Each year thousands of young men leave their homes, their communities, and their high and preparatory themselves in new surroundings. They face a new and often confusing life, a life that needs central cores to help them maintain balance and to direct their efforts toward worthwhile goals. Without such agencies, the college newcomer may waste valuable time. Your fraternity is one of the most significant campus groups that supplies this need.

One of the fraternity’s most important functions is to provide a college home for schools to prove its members. The older men of the chapter take the new men into their group life, replacing the familiar atmosphere of the home with the spirit of brotherhood.

The chapter house furnishes an ideal common ground for frank, informal discussions between professor and student, between graduate and undergraduate. Here all may sit down together and analyze the myriad problems confronting today’s student, thereby developing a tolerance for the viewpoint of others, and enabling the newcomer to clarity and to justify his own reasoning. The intimacy in which he lives with his brothers teaches him that human beings have faults; some must be overlooked; others must be challenged and changed.

The social functions of the group cultivate poise; and the friendly comradeship in the chapter house during hours of relaxation satisfies the instinct for fellowship, inspiring the timid to greater expression and participation, and curbing the more aggressive.

Fraternities will continue to expand and prosper so long as they promote and support the same principles of higher education as do their hosts, the colleges, and universities. For example, a prime objective of the system must always be the
improvement of scholastic achievement. By setting a good example and drawing upon their own experiences, the upperclassmen can provide invaluable academic guidance for their younger brothers.

“Today, the American people, perhaps as never before, are in need of the unusual, the distinctive, the uncommon man and leader-men and women of character and courage who have undergone the disciplines and the experiences which develop their highest potentials. I sincerely believe that college fraternities are important institutions contributing to the development of such men and women.” - W.C. Mullendore, Former Chairmen of Southern California Edison Company

Where Did It All Begin?

The college fraternity as an institution is precisely as old as our nation. It was in 1776, at the College of William and Mary, that Phi Beta Kappa, the first fraternity, was organized. Today, in the restored beauty of Colonial Williamsburg, you can stand in the Apollo Room of the historic Raleigh Tavern where the Phi Beta Kappa charter was drafted. Although established as a general fraternity, and as such expanded to Yale, Harvard and Dartmouth, Phi Beta Kappa soon became an honorary scholarship society, and has maintained this position for a century and a half.

The next fraternity, Kappa Alpha Society, was founded at Union College in 1825, and is the oldest surviving secret general fraternity. Two years later Sigma Phi and Delta Phi were founded at Union, and with Kappa Alpha constitute the Union Triad.

Alpha Delta Phi, founded at Hamilton in 1832, placed the first chapter beyond the Alleghenies in 1833 at Miami University in Ohio. Three great national fraternities, now known as the Miami Triad, were founded at Miami beginning in 1839-Beta Theta Pi, Phi Delta Theta, and Sigma Chi.

“I shall never be able to compensate my fraternity for all that it has done for me, no matter what service I may be allowed to give. In it I have found my most intimate friends. As undergraduate chapter president, I gained broad administrative experience, and from my fraternity I have derived my most cherished ideals of conduct.” - Dr. Herman B. Wells, Sigma Nu, Former Indiana University President

By 1860 the fraternity system was firmly established. Twenty-two of the present-day orders had been founded and had 237 surviving chapters. The Civil War closed many colleges and interrupted the development of fraternities. Following the war, however, men of both South and North, struggling for order in an unprecedented social vacuum, felt the need for fraternal organizations, and their influence spread rapidly.

For many years, particularly prior to 1900, fraternities were vigorously opposed (likely with good reason in some instances) by college faculties and by the public. They were everywhere confronted with problems of internal administration, of adequate
financing and of alumni support. All of these demanded able leadership, which, in most cases, was forthcoming.

“Maturity crowds upon youth of college age. Among the firsts in college is the adjustment of living in close companionship and harmony with fellow students of varying interests, talents, and characteristics. Fraternity life presents this opportunity under leadership, along with the valued experience of financial responsibility of successfully operating a home-like environment.” - George Murray Campbell, Phi Sigma Kappa, Former Vice-President Baltimore and Ohio Railroad

The National Interfraternity Conference

Perhaps the organization of the National Interfraternity Conference (NIC) in 1909 was the event which determined that fraternities were not merely to exist, but were destined to enjoy the full respect of their various communities and to occupy a position of real importance while rendering a positive service to our educational structure. The NIC provides a forum within which each member group may make its principles known to all who want to know them.

The NIC is an organization composed of general fraternities in the United States and Canada. Founded as an advisory body, its purpose is to discuss questions of mutual interest and to make recommendations to the member fraternities and to the fraternity system. It has a membership of 63 orders with more than 5,000 chapters in more than 800 colleges and universities. More than 3.8 million men have been initiated into these fraternities.

Phi Sigma Kappa was a charter member of the Conference, and has contributed much to its formation, development, and deliberations. Several high offices have been held by Phi Sigs. Walter H. Conley (Union ‘91), was its President in 1925; Herbert L. Brown (Swarthmore ‘16), was President in 1955; and Charles V. Loring, (University of California/Santa Barbara ‘72) was president in 1988. Horace R. Barnes, (Pennsylvania ‘11), John H. Marchmont (Columbia ‘10), D. R. (Spec) Collins, (Iowa State ‘17) and James S. Whitfield, (Central Missouri ‘50) Drury G. Bagwell (Tennessee ‘64) and Timothy Vojtasko (Indiana/PA ‘85) served as members of the Board of Directors. The Conference meets in early December in various cities. These meetings are normally attended by more than 900 officers and alumni of member fraternities.

“My chapter house was a place where deep friendships were formed. The bond of brotherhood within the chapters was always a sustaining force and an urge to do a better job scholastically and otherwise in campus life. The traits of character which were nurtured there ripened and increased my sense of being useful in later life.” - D. William Brosnon, Phi Sigma Kappa, Former President, Southern Railway System
The Fraternity Executives Association

Phi Sigma Kappa also continues to be an active member of the Fraternity Executives Association (FEA) which includes Executive Directors and their assistants. The CFEA (College Fraternity Editors Association) includes magazine editors of nearly all general fraternities and sororities as well as some professional fraternities.

The Symbols of the Greek World

To a fraternity man, the recognition and correct use of the Greek alphabet is almost as natural as the breathing process. The alphabet has 24 letters, each having a Greek pronunciation and an English pronunciation. In some cases, these are identical. Phi Sigma Kappa’s chapters are designated by letters of the Greek alphabet, the first series without a suffix; the second series by adding the Greek word Deuteron; the third series, Triton; the fourth series, Tetarton; the fifth series, Pentaton; the sixth series, Hexaton; and the seventh series, Septaton. Former chapters of Phi Sigma Epsilon are indicated by two-letter names beginning with the letters Epsilon, Phi and Sigma, except for Alpha Epsilon, Beta Epsilon, and Gamma Epsilon, PSE’s three founding chapters.

“In my judgment the college fraternity has been of inestimable value in making men across the years...It is natural for men to come together in compatible, mutual friendship, and when they do so under the high ideals of a fraternity, it proves to be most beneficial.” - Norman Vincent Peale, Phi Gamma Delta, Author and Minister

Fraternity Symbols

Signs and symbols are a part of everyday life, and have become a universal language in science, literature, art, music, religion, and in such contemporary fields as advertising, suggesting ideas beyond what mere words can express. As visible evidence of their membership, fraternity men wear distinguishing badges serving as marks of identification.

Fraternity badges generally take the form of a shield, a diamond, a monogram of the order’s Greek letters, a cross, or other symbols having religious connotation. During the days of the Roman persecution, Christians identified themselves secretly with the form of the Cross as a reminder of what Christ meant to them. It was after the third century A.D. that the Cross came into open use in churches and cemeteries.

“I took a great deal more from my fraternity than I gave—but what I took was very great deal-companionship of the highest order, self-confidence born of belonging to a group of which I was proud, enrichment of my personal life, which gave all my college career added dimension, and even an extra bond to seal life-long friendships that already existed.” Walter Cronkite, Chi Phi, CBS News Analyst
Among the symbols that Christians cherish, none is more widely revered today than the cross. It has more than 50 variations in common use, and many fraternities and sororities have made it the central theme of their badges and associate pins.

Other common Greek symbols are the circle, the equilateral triangle, the trefoil, and the fleur-de-lis. The circle appears to be without beginning and without end; it signifies perfection, completeness, and eternity. The equilateral triangle is symbolic of the Trinity, often given other meanings by the fraternity or sorority using it. The trefoil, formed by three intersecting circles, expresses the unity, equality, and eternity of the Trinity. The fleur-de-lis was used in ancient Egypt to symbolize immortality, and in France to represent purity. These and other symbols originating in the religions and cultures of many races have been incorporated by many orders into their esoteric or secret work.

Many have expressed keen interest in the three T’s design, depicted on Phi Sigma Kappa’s crest, and have wondered how the symbols originated and what they represent. Their meaning is known only to members of our order.

As a fraternity man, you should be able to identify the badges of other fraternities and sororities, especially those represented by chapters on your campus.

“I found in my chapter companionship and guidance from older men, discipline and true fellowship. The fraternity is more than just a boarding house. It is a temple of good will, of mutual assistance and enlightenment. The benefits derived are constant companions with alert fellow students in all activities of university life, and it tends to create more mature, responsible and intelligent citizens.” - Lloyd Wright, Kappa Alpha Order, Past President, American Bar Association

In this chapter you have attained a glimpse of the rich diversity of the “Greek world.” The strength of the college fraternity system depends on the integrity of the interfraternity cooperation. This cooperation emerges from the regard each Greek has for his own fraternity. We believe that Phi Sigma Kappa deserves your esteem and your loyalty.

How to Wear the Associate Pin and Fraternity Badge

For colony members, who wear the associate pin, and initiated chapter members, who wear the fraternity badge, it is important to wear the pin and badge in the proper manner. They should always be worn on neat and respectable attire. As a rule, this means they should be worn with collared shirts, sweaters, vests, or coat and tie. They should always be worn on your shirt, sweater, or vest, over the heart (in practice, just over the left pocket if your shirt has one). Never wear your pin or badge on
a coat lapel. If you desire, you may purchase a small recognition pin for that purpose. Your pin or badge should be worn with pride and never in a manner which is degrading to the Fraternity or the principles which the pin and badge represent.