

The Captain's Log

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Fraternities Across U.S. Forced to Dry Up Their Acts

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TMS Campus

Sadly, the wrench in the college fraternity system has practically become old news. The incidences of alcohol poisoning, drug overdoses and date rapes in the news have blended together, creating an altogether unsteady foundation for the fraternity system. School officials, family members, and the media are searching for answers, closing down houses, and arresting students, laying blame whole-heartedly on everything from underage drinking to the movie "Animal House."

Many colleges are laying down a firm new law: since their fraternities cannot handle drinking responsibly in their houses, they should drink at all on campus. The concept of a dry fraternity is met with two reactions: "It'll never happen," and "What is the point of an alcohol-free frat?" However, it may not be the fairy tale many believe it to be. "By July 1, 2001, all our chapters will be alcohol-free, no matter what," says Robert Biggs, executive vice president of Phi Delta Theta.

"Our target is to be dry by August 1, 2001," says Keith Gilchrist, executive director of Alpha Kappa Lambda."

And so it goes for about 10 more fraternities, who, out of 66 national fraternities, represent approximately a quarter of the Greek system that will be officially dry: that is, no alcohol allowed on premises.

"We wanted to rid the cancer of the misuse and abuse of alcohol," says Biggs.

National fraternities have recognized a problem with chapters that have are now out of control.

"Over the last 15 years or so, we have had occasional problems," says Gilchrist. "Injuries, property damage. At least there haven't been any deaths."

According to Dr. Richard McKaig, the Executive Director of the Indiana University Center for the Study of the College Fraternity, there has been a marked drop in overall fraternity membership due to such problems as those

listed by Gilchrist.

However, while fraternities monitored the growing problems with out-of-control partying, experts also noticed interesting trends with fraternities that do not allow drinking on premises.

"The scholarship funding goes up, the membership goes up, the incidents of abuse to property go down, and the insurance premiums go down," says Jon Williamson, the Executive Vice President at the North American Interfraternity Conference.

"There will still be drinking," points out Gerardo Gonzalez, the Dean of the School of Education at Indiana University, "But they are contributing to the attitude that alcohol does not need to be the center of attention." However, not all fraternity experts see much use in eliminating the use of alcohol on campus.

"There are too many concerns about how it is going to be reinforced," says Tom Goodale, the Executive Director of Sigma Alpha Epsilon. "We can't control 9,000 lives. Students will be drinking. Most come to college with their alcohol patterns already in place. We simply need to make allowances for mistakes, and the students must be responsible to themselves."

Goodale finds that the concept of 'binge drinking' (defined as having five or more drinks in one sitting, more than once every two weeks) "part of media hype. Each tragic situation is completely different. Sometimes it is the fault of the fraternity, sometimes it is the fault of the individual."

Goodale is in favor of drinking responsibly, but not denying alcohol in its entirety. "We try to use character education, and make students think about whether the things they do with their friends are what they would like their family members to see them doing," he says. Goodale is a major advocate of BACCHUS and GAMMA, large North American organizations which stand for Boosting Alcohol Consciousness Concerning the Health of University Students/ Greeks Advocating Mature Management of Alcohol.

Goodale point is that while fraternities themselves will not have alcohol allowed on premises, this does nothing to prevent binge drinking at events located off campus.

Dean Kelly, a junior at the University of Missouri and a member of Alpha Kappa Lambda, agrees with part of Goodale's criticism of going dry. UM's alcohol policy for AKL came into effect August 1, 2000.

"There may be an increase in drunk driving, since the parties will be off campus. They might charter buses, but not everybody will be able to take them. It just might be a downside to the frat going dry," Kelly says.

Lissa Bradford is the Immediate Past Chairman Co-Chair of the National Panhellenic Conference, which represents the 26 female fraternities, or

sororities. The NPC in general holds a policy where sororities will not co-sponsor an even with a fraternity unless the fraternity is dry. "The dry policies are good for the fraternity system, and without our support, the effort will fail. We are just trying to create a level playing field, without giving advantage to alcohol-serving fraternities," Bradford says.

With regards to concerns about drunk driving, Bradford retorts, "Sorority events involving alcohol have always been off campus. The sisters don't try to fight it, because they can't. They find some sort of transportation, and they know that it is the best way. It may not be the cheapest or most convenient, but it's the best. The men must understand that they will have to do it too. We are trying to teach personal responsibility, and there is nothing responsible about [drunk driving]."

It seems that fraternity members are taking the news of "Dry2K" in stride.

"People last semester were saying, 'Oh no, there's no longer gonna be any more fun,'" says Kelly, "But now we see it with a positive view, that drinking is not that important. Plus, when I am recruiting freshmen, I say 'Look, there will still be parties, and the upside is that you won't have to clean them up,' and they seem cool with it. And if it discourages people who want to be always wasted, then that's fine! wouldn't want to hang out with those kind of people anyway, since they probably wouldn't even make it through four years of school, and would just be idiots."

Senior Matt Puett, also an MU Greek, agrees. "I think it's going to be positive to have everyone work together to help solve the ongoing problem [of alcohol abuse.] It will definitely be a lifestyle change for all of us," Puett says. "It's going to be a difficult atmosphere, but it will be a change for the better."

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