

Creating A Culture of Academic Success

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The following article represents one alumnus' suggestions and advice offered to chapters and undergraduate members for their review and use as they may determine; while it may contain language and phrases which could be misinterpreted as directives, the author and the publisher do not intend the advice given therein as anything but a helpful tool which a chapter seeking to improve its academic standing might choose to use. Thus, the article is offered for whatever use or help a particular chapter might make of it.

Pike has been dominant on many campuses in the areas of recruitment and athletics for many years. These results are tangible and quantifiable for others to evaluate Pi Kappa Alpha's strength in these areas. As the school year draws to a close, it is necessary for each chapter to critically assess the accomplishments and shortcomings of its programs. Just as there is a clear winner and a clear loser in recruitment and athletics, the same can be said for the academic arena. However, college students may not devote the same time and attention to academic achievement as they do other areas of programming. Even the top performing fraternities may look at their accomplishments as some serendipitous feat rather than a result of their careful and strategic planning for academic success. This begs two very important questions for us: "Is Pike the leading academic fraternity on your campus?" and "What does your chapter do to ensure that Pike will place the most accomplished and well-rounded men into the workforce and into leading graduate schools?"

Answering the first question "Is Pike the leading academic fraternity on your campus?" can be done with a simple "yes" or "no". For our top academic chapters, winning grades are the result of a shared culture that expects and requires academic performance. These chapters understand that success



in the classroom provides tremendous opportunities for partnerships with faculty members, administrators, alumni and community leaders. Examples of strong partnerships include: faculty providing graduate school recommendations for Pike members, administrators asking Pikes to sit on academic review and policy-making committees, alumni granting internship and job opportunities for Pikes, and community leaders requesting Pikes to begin mentoring programs for at-risk children.

Being a top academic fraternity will allow chapters to recruit like-minded men who place importance on academic success. The chapter's cumulative grade point average (GPA) is a point of pride and there is always a goal to maintain or improve the GPA. Once momentum has been established, strong academic chapters continually raise the bar by increasing the minimum requirements for pledging, membership, or holding an office. Members treat academics as a competition, both internally by competing for scholarships within the chapter and externally by competing for scholarship awards on campus and within the fraternity. Pike is also in competition for memberships in prestigious campus and national honoraries.

It is easy to spot the academic contenders from the pretenders on any given campus. Many Greek Life offices publish grade reports for several semesters previous and chapter affiliations among those tapped for Greek academic honoraries. If your chapter has made strides to improve its lot in the Greek rankings by raising its grade point average, say from 12th to 5th in three semesters, it is safe to say that your chapter is firmly in the contender category for the leading academic fraternity on your campus. Conversely, if your chapter consistently ranks in the bottom half of your Greek rankings and does not have any members chosen for the various academic honoraries on your campus, it is safe to say that your chapter falls into the pretender category. Steadfast efforts need to be made to change the culture within your chapter to place a strong focus on academic achievement.

In answering the second question, chapters can create an action plan to transform their academic program from pretender to contender and ultimately to ensure that Pike will place the most accomplished and well-rounded men into the workforce and into leading graduate schools. First, each and every chapter should set a goal for where they want their cumulative grade point average to be at the end of the semester and the academic year, as well as several years out. Likewise, each member should set individual goals in these same time periods and these goals should be documented and made known to each member of the chapter. Next, the executive council must make a firm resolve to recruit, pledge, and initiate only men who remain faithful to their scholarship commitments. This might seem harsh, but a "True Pike" is urged "to encourage [his] chapter to establish and enforce rigorous academic standards".

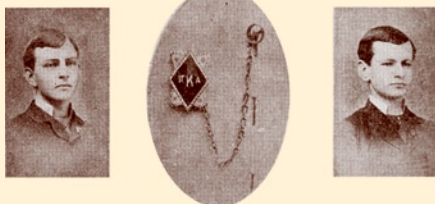
Some ways that chapters can establish rigorous academic standards and foster academic success include:

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News of Bygone Days

100 Years Ago...

From the June 1906 *Shield & Diamond*: "It is finished! Another year has closed in the glory of Commencement week, and we pause to reflect on what we have accomplished. Kappa and Omega Chapters have added many splendid men to the ranks of Pi Kappa Alpha during the past year, and the future of our dear Fraternity in Kentucky is indeed bright."



125 Years Ago... 1881 was a lean period for Pi Kappa Alpha. This is the first photo of Theta Chapter (then at Stewart College, now at Rhodes College), from the school year 1880-1881. Clockwise from upper left are Milton H. Hunt, W.A. Carter, W.B. Young, George Thompson, John B. Cavitt, George Blackburn, W.D. Gallbreath, Sheridan H. Cavitt, James R. Howerton (a charter member) and Vernor S. Wardlaw.

75 Years Ago...

Gamma Rho Chapter was chartered at Northwestern University on February 6, 1931. The June 1931 issue of *Shield & Diamond* carried the story of Dr. Thornwell Jacobs (*Presbyterian, Mu 1892*), president of Oglethorpe University in Atlanta, Georgia: "Jacobs announced that his institution is to be among the first to offer a complete college course by radio. 'It will be possible,' says Dr. Jacobs, 'for any person who is the owner

of a radio to listen to every college course that can be successfully taught over the radio, without charge... We propose to found and operate a complete extension university of the air."

50 Years Ago... In 1956, while planning for the upcoming Convention in Mexico City, the topic of recruitment was of primary importance. Delta Gamma Chapter (Ohio) reported, "Friendship is our greatest selling point. (We have) the proud distinction of being known as the 'friendliest' fraternity on campus (and) revel in this honor..."

25 Years Ago... The June 1981 *Shield & Diamond* reported, "Greeks are more likely to graduate from college than independents, according to a recently published study at Oregon State University."

graduates. Ample services exist in each of these areas on your campus through the Career Services office, and these professionals are usually very willing to speak with student groups.

Every college-bound young man should, at a minimum, expect to graduate within a five year period and be afforded the opportunity to attend graduate school or compete for well-regarded jobs. Bottom-line, these opportunities require a minimum 3.0 GPA for consideration by most reputable employers and graduate schools. Chapters may do well to document their successes in placing members in top internships, graduate schools, as well as in the workforce. Furthermore, just as we strive to initiate the overwhelming majority of our new members, the same can be said for our graduation rate. It is a good suggestion that each chapter implement a plan to graduate a large percentage of initiates per year and see that each member has a plan for success upon graduation that is congruent with his larger life goals. If we articulate and implement these very simple goals, Pike will provide beneficial services for its members that will impact their immediate future as well as their long-term success.

As Pikes, we do not settle for the minimum requirements. During the 2004-2005 school year, 21 chapters (roughly 10% of our chapters) received a Scholarship Plate from the International Fraternity for achieving a 3.0 GPA or better. Of these chapters, 18 received Chapter Excellence Awards and eight received Robert Adger Smythe Awards. The other 11 Smythe Award winners likely either won grades or were firmly entrenched as a contenders on their campuses. The conclusion may be made that the best and brightest on our campuses are also the best and brightest within Pike.

What would happen if only 10% of our chapters won recruitment or were the top athletic fraternity on their campus? Undoubtedly, Pike would be unable to ensure our place as the best within the fraternity world. We would not be able to create that ultimate fraternity experience that provides the best of everything that fraternities have to offer: social opportunities, networking, leadership and personal development, as well as the affiliation with over 200,000 men of integrity who fill Pi Kappa Alpha's ranks. However, that experience comes at a price. We must first succeed in the classroom, and we must create a new paradigm for how Pi Kappa Alpha is viewed on our campuses.

Academic Success

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- Incrementally set goals to improve your chapter's academic standing - start small and work your way to the top
- Encourage members to raise their semester GPA by specific amounts (0.1, 0.25, 0.5) and provide incentives for all who accomplish these goals
- Challenge your next pledge class to outperform the active chapter in grades and give them the necessary tools to be competitive
- Allocate funds to pay induction fees for your members into campus honoraries
- Invite faculty members to chapter meetings to speak on academic integrity and how to properly conduct research
- Specifically target top scholars in recruitment and ensure that the

majority of your pledge class contains academically focused individuals

Attracting men who are committed to scholastic achievement is easy. Pike is a vehicle for achieving academic success, and those men who place academics at a premium will be attracted to the Fraternity because of the opportunities that Pike provides. For example, chapters may provide comprehensive education on being successful in college. Pledge education should stress proper time management and study skills. As a sophomore, how to find an internship as well as developing a portfolio of one's work could be discussed.

Proper interviewing techniques and resumé writing might be integrated into the education process during the junior year. Finally, as a senior, seminars on graduate school preparation and job search techniques are essential to ensuring 100% placement for our