Addendum to “The American Fraternity”
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Those of us who listened to Betty Mullins Jones deliver this speech at the bi-centennial celebration of fraternity/sorority life in Williamsburg, Virginia, in 1976, were, as always, enthralled by her wit, her dry sense of humor, and the thoroughness with which she researched the history of our fraternity/sorority heritage. To attempt to add to this overview seems almost blasphemous.

However, in the intervening twenty-five years, new initiatives to address continuing problems and a changing culture with increased expectations from society in general have subsequently impacted our fraternity/sorority community.

Perhaps the biggest change has been the introduction of risk management and liability concepts. While fraternities and, to a lesser extent, sororities continued to serve as the primary social outlet on many campuses, the resulting property damage, injuries, and fatalities took their toll when juries began awarding millions of dollars to an increasing litigious society. Fraternities and sororities found it ever more difficult to obtain insurance, and the result was the establishment of the Fraternity Insurance Purchasing Group (FIPG), a group of fraternities that joined together to form a clearinghouse for information on risk management and liability insurance. In short order, the risk management guidelines of FIPG were adopted by most other inter/national organizations, and a new culture of liability awareness emerged in fraternity/sorority life. (A sign of the constant change in this area, FIPG has since changed its focus and name to Fraternal Information and Programming Group.) Substance-free housing initiatives and shortened new member programs are direct results of the increased role that risk management plays in fraternity/sorority management. Education of chapter members and alumni/ae is a continuing commitment of the general headquarters and the campus fraternity/sorority advisors.

Another development in the fraternity/sorority world has been the emergence of ethnic fraternities and sororities and their umbrella organizations. Although integration and interaction remain primary goals of our organizations, students themselves have acted on their need for cultural identity by establishing Latino/a, Asian, Native American, and other specifically-identified groups. One result of this process has been the founding of overall governing bodies (e.g., The National Association of Latino Fraternal Organizations, Inc. known as NALFO).

Perhaps the most significant change in sororities has been the adoption of “no frills” recruitment guidelines initiated by the National Panhellenic Conference. In keeping with the change in student culture and the needs of entering freshmen, sororities now meet and greet potential new members by making a significant effort to get acquainted through conversation, as opposed to entertaining them with songs and skits.
As in every facet of life, “politically correct” terminology has become important. We no longer “rush” our new members; they are recruited. Rushees have become potential members. Rush parties are recruitment events. Pledge trainers are obsolete; we have new member educators who begin a series of program activities to educate the newest members of our chapters throughout their college careers. We refer to fraternities and sororities, rather than “Greeks,” because some of our groups do not use Greek letters.

Our way of doing business has also changed to meet student expectations. No more keggers or open punch bowls (the impact of “club” or “designer” drugs continues to increase). No more “ton of sand dumped into the basement for a luau” mentality. No more co-sponsored events in “wet” fraternity houses. “Fraternities [and sororities] are struggling with old stereotypes and new problems. Hazing and alcohol abuse have put the system under strain. Aging housing, emphasis on academic performance and a wave of time-taxed students working to keep up with college costs have added stress,” according to the *Columbus Dispatch*.

So how will we answer the ultimate question regarding the survival of fraternities and sororities in the coming decades? Just as Betty Mullins Jones did in her speech twenty-five years ago. As members of the fraternity/sorority world gathered in Williamsburg to recognize the founding of Phi Beta Kappa, the first fraternal organization, in 1776, Betty stated: “...young people are human beings, and the human animal has always sought companionship, preferably with those who are congenial. If the fraternity system were eliminated today, tomorrow something would rise to take its place. And it would rise without 200 years of tradition to mold it, without strong national organizations to supervise it, and without the intense loyalties which have perpetuated fraternities.”

Yes, indeed fraternities and sororities will survive.