

REPORT OF THE TRUSTEE TASK FORCE ON GREEK LIFE

Presented to the Alfred University Board of Trustees
Alfred University, May 17, 2002

Introduction

At its February 2002 meeting the Alfred University Board of Trustees was informed of a confluence of extremely disturbing events: yet again several Greek houses were charged with violating University policies on hazing and/or alcohol, a fraternity man had allegedly been the victim of assault by his own fraternity brothers, and worst of all he had subsequently died of causes yet unknown.¹ In response to this news about a Greek system suffering from persistent and increasing problems, despite declining membership, the Board established a Trustee Task Force on Greek Life “to evaluate whether the fraternities and sororities have a future role at our University” and to report to the Board at its May 2002 meeting.

Over the last decade the Board has received periodic reports about Greek life suggesting that, however noble and honorable its roots and however much it had contributed to the success of the University in the past, it was becoming less and less consistent with the institution’s mission:

Alfred University’s commitment is to foster a spirit of inquiry, search for knowledge through fundamental and applied research, and transmit that knowledge to our students in a highly-personalized environment. Valuing diversity, tolerance, interdisciplinary work, and active learning, the University strives to develop our students’ ability to think critically, communicate clearly, understand an increasingly complex, technology-dependent, international society and respond

¹ The District Attorney issued a statement in late April, which asserted that while the student was the victim of an assault, “his death cannot be directly attributed to the assault.”

creatively to change, preparing them for a life of achievement and leadership.

A more systematic review and report of Greek life seemed in order.

Chaired by a former Board chairperson, the Task Force (Appendix A) is composed of four trustees, all of whom are Greek themselves (two at Alfred); two faculty members; a representative of both the Alumni Association and the Parent's Association (who is also a Greek); and the Associate Provost/Vice President for Enrollment Management. Though the original intention was to include one or two students, reports of potential intimidation and harassment of those students led us reluctantly to elect not to include students on the Task Force. However, all current students, as well as alumni, were emailed invitations to communicate with the Task Force through a confidential web site.

The goals of the Task Force were to conduct a fair, objective and balanced inquiry into the past and present role of Greek life at Alfred University and to determine whether that role is consistent with the mission of the University. To accomplish this, the Task Force studied data in absolute and relative, as well as historical and contemporary, terms about Greek students versus non-Greek students at AU. We reviewed a number of reports comparing academic performance, drinking habits, and community service among Greeks and non-Greeks at Alfred. We also examined general student interest in joining Greek organizations, as well as interest by gender and ethnicity. We compared Alfred to national data and trends, and we reviewed the work of similar task forces at 20 other colleges and universities (summarized in Appendix B).

The Task Force met every two weeks on campus between February 28th and May 2nd, or 6 times, for a total of 30 hours. We met with approximately three dozen people from a cross section of the campus community, including administrators, staff, students, alumni, Counseling and Residence Life staff, local police and a businessperson. A special meeting was also held with Greek presidents; 8 of 12 attended. (For a

complete list of information reviewed and interviews conducted, see Appendix C).

In addition to the information gathered at these meetings, the Task Force received 248 emails and letters, mostly from students (135) and alumni (62), as well as parents (23), faculty (20), and various other interested parties (8). It also looked at documents like the Harvard School of Public Health's longitudinal study of drinking at colleges and universities, as well as a number of editorial responses to that study, and reviewed reports from the Vice President for University Relations and the Vice President for Student Affairs/Dean of Students.

Difficult though the decision was, we have agreed unanimously that the Greek system should be eliminated as quickly as possible.

Despite the valuable experiences it offers its members, as a whole the Greek system has deteriorated significantly over time even though the administration has made numerous attempts to support and strengthen it. The system requires a disproportionate amount of time and resources for the benefits it affords a small group of students, hurts relations between the University and the community, and sometimes works to the detriment of its voluntary participants.

These considerations are not the sole reasons for our recommendation. Equally compelling is the prospect that eliminating Greek life will create the opportunity for the most dramatic positive change in campus life in decades and is replete with possibilities for advancing the University's mission.

To explain how we reached this conclusion, we have structured our report into sections as follows:

Introduction

I. Historical Background

II. Rationale for the Recommendation

III. Suggested Changes in Student Life

Appendices

I) Historical Background

Social fraternities and sororities were first established at Alfred University about the time of World War I, nearly 85 years ago. This was significantly later than their origins in 1832 at Union College, in 1845 at Colby, and in the 1850's on many other campuses, because Alfred's founding fathers and mothers were firmly opposed to secret societies.

Nonetheless, Greek membership went on to prosper at Alfred and peaked in the early 1930s, when about 50% of the students had Greek affiliation. The bonds of close, durable friendship and opportunities for leadership, as well as the social life and semi-independent living, were very meaningful to generations of Alfred students. Their importance in the history of the University is exemplified by the high percentage of Alfred Trustees (23 of 28—or 82%--of the alumni trustees) and other distinguished alumni/alumnae who joined a fraternity or sorority, valued the experience, and now cherish both friendships and memories.

Since the 1970s, however, Greek membership has undergone a prolonged, persistent decline (Appendix D) from 40-45% of the students to the current level of 10% (14% of men, 7% of women). In their prime some Greek houses had as many as 50 or 60 members—one had nearly 100. But as of Fall 2001 every house had fewer than 25 active members, and 8 of 12 had fewer than 20 (Appendix E). In absolute terms house occupancy is well below historical levels, and in relative terms most houses are less than 50% occupied.

The decline in the number of students both joining and living in Greek houses is not unique to Alfred. According to an annual national survey (CIRP) and reports the Task Force reviewed from 20 small colleges and universities in rural locations throughout the Northeast, student interest in fraternity and sorority membership has fallen everywhere and recruiting new members has become more and more difficult (Appendix F). In the Fall of 2001 only 9% of incoming freshmen nationally expressed

interest in social fraternities or sororities; at Alfred less than half that (only 4%) recorded interest (Appendices F and G).

These severe declines began in the early 70s during a period of major social and cultural changes in this country, including:

- Greatly increased ethnic diversity in the student body
- Greater numbers of women attending college
- Greater support for individual rights
- Rejection of authority
- Increases in the divorce rate and new strains on family life
- Uncertainty in the face of changing values, and
- Increasing numbers of college students with disabilities, psychological vulnerabilities, and prior drug or alcohol abuse

Amid this swirl of change, Greek life experienced significant declines in membership. As a result, in recent decades campuses throughout the Northeast began to reassess the role of fraternities and sororities. Many colleges found their Greek systems were experiencing similar problems, among them:

- Significant membership declines
- Membership unrepresentative of the evolving ethnic and gender mix of students
- Minimal faculty involvement
- Difficulty in recruiting advisors
- Practices inconsistent with the academic mission
- Juniors and seniors opting not to live in their chapter houses
- Poor house maintenance and deteriorating infrastructure
- Mostly disengaged alumni, and
- Weak financial conditions

Campuses also uniformly suffered continuing abuses and violations of alcohol laws and hazing policies by Greek houses. Because social fraternal groups are founded on secrecy, with rituals and initiations

intrinsic to defining and solidifying each group, attempts by administrators to curtail these abuses were consistently thwarted by peer pressure to deny any violations.

While Alfred faced all these problems, it also suffered below average academic performance by most Greeks members (Appendix H) relative to the general student population, and relative to that predicted by their SAT scores and high school class rank.

Some colleges found that upon becoming coeducational their Greek groups were not willing to share power and responsibility with the incoming female students. Other campuses faced protests from students because housing options and social spaces were inequitably distributed across the student body: social spaces and prime off-campus residences were most often located in fraternity houses, which were neither managed by the college nor available to other student organizations.

Changes in federal and state laws impacted Greek life during this period too when drinking for most college students and hazing became illegal. The drinking age was raised from 18 to 19 in 1982, then to 21 in 1985. This, of course, had an enormous impact on campus social life, burdening colleges with the role of policing under-age drinking in addition to teaching moderation with alcohol. College administrations also had to police hazing, which became illegal in New York and some 41 other states. (The driving force in this effort was Eileen Stevens, who turned the tragedy of her son Chuck Stenzel's death in 1978 at Alfred—during a tapping night hazing/drinking ritual—into a national campaign against hazing.)

During these troubling times for fraternities and sororities, the Alfred administration tried to help the Greek system in a variety of ways. It encouraged the founding of several new chapters of nationals. Alpha Kappa Alpha opened in 1988 but eventually closed, as did Kappa Alpha Psi (1989). Sigma Alpha Mu (1989), Kappa Sigma (1992) and Delta Zeta (1994) succeeded in staying open.

All of this happened under former President Coll, who campaigned tirelessly for a Greek Row on University property. He hoped to create safe, modern, clustered housing for the Greek community on campus. However, active Greeks and Greek alumni failed to support the concept, and despite extensive efforts and planning the project never got off the ground. (Only one house, currently under construction with significant University financial support, has taken advantage of the program, while another was built in the 1970s with University support.)

Despite these and other efforts by the Alfred administration, during the 1990s the problems continued and the violations escalated. As a result, some of the national fraternal organizations with Alfred chapters rated them “very risky,” and two of the nationals revoked charters: Lambda Chi Alpha in 1992 (re-colonized in 2001), and ZBT in 1989 (re-colonized in 1990, and suspended in 2002). These assessments and revocations from national organizations indicated genuine concerns in the external Greek community, as well as in the University. Clearly, these were shared concerns. (For these reasons, the University undertook even more reform efforts, detailed later.) Given this track record, it is no surprise that more recent attempts by the administration to attract new chapters have met with reluctance from national organizations.

All the colleges surveyed recognized that a familiar social structure established decades earlier—in which colleges essentially delegated responsibility for most off-campus residential and social life to fraternities—was no longer capable of serving all, or even most, students. In a very real sense, Greek life had not kept up with the changing times. One college even found that its national ranking was slipping because it had a reputation as a fraternity/party school.

Each campus responded in its own way consistent with its values, structure, and history. Nearly all the 20 colleges and universities we surveyed undertook significant, broad-ranging reviews of their Greek systems, often led by a Trustee task force. Each wrestled with issues like

educational mission, safety, equity in student life, and declining interest in Greek houses. To create fairness and diversity in housing and social life, some sought to re-integrate Greek life into their academic mission while others eliminated Greek life altogether (Appendix B).

Some schools—Williams, Ithaca, Colby, Amherst, Franklin & Marshall, and Bowdoin—abolished social fraternities, concluding that they had become incompatible with the college’s academic mission. They reconfigured their residential and social life, reinforcing the academic focus and making social space available to everyone. This was accomplished by converting Greek houses into “house,” “commons,” or “program house” communities, giving all students the opportunity to forge bonds of friendship through shared living experiences and some measure of self-governance.

Rather than eliminating Greek life, other schools undertook major reforms such as requiring affiliation with a national organization, moving rush to sophomore year, prohibiting sophomores from living in Greek houses, establishing four-year residency requirements, and acquiring Greek houses for conversion to special interest houses (while moving the Greek students into dorms). More specifically:

- Hamilton eliminated all fraternity houses while retaining “social groups” which live in general student housing.
- Union is integrating its fraternity houses into general housing with assignments at the college’s discretion, and requiring Greek organizations to fill their houses to at least 80% occupancy.
- Bucknell has recently purchased nearly all its fraternity houses and now runs them like other residence halls.
- Hobart leases the houses from their housing corporations, provides maintenance and regular security tours. In addition, Hobart bills the rooms at the regular Hobart room rate at 95% occupancy (even if fewer students are living there).

- Lawrence has eliminated fraternity houses and is turning them into “program houses”: all student groups may apply for this housing on an annual basis.

Alfred has suffered problems with its Greek system similar to these other schools, including a three-decade decline in membership from 40-45% of the students to about 10%. Contrary to an often-heard complaint from the Greeks, the Task Force found that during this decline the University took numerous steps to reform and otherwise support and strengthen Greek life (some of which were noted above). In the 1970s and 1980s the Dean of Students/Vice President for Student Affairs served as Greek adviser, and met regularly with the Inter-Greek Council and individual house officers to discuss standards and expectations. A minimum GPA standard for pledging was established and rush was moved to second semester of the freshman year, in line with trends of the time. Consultants were brought in to assess the system and in the early 1990s a new position—Assistant Dean of Students for Greek Affairs—was created even as membership took yet another precipitous decline from about 40% to about 20-25% of the student body.

The Assistant Dean worked with the students on leadership development, standards, and expectations. Students were sent to leadership conferences and offered leadership workshops on campus. A Greek Life Project (1992) was initiated to strengthen the system, followed by Greek Life Benchmarks (1994, revised 1996). More recently, a Greek Life Relational Statement was created (1999), as was a Greek Life Code of Pride (1999, replacing the 1996 Benchmarks) with cash rewards for excellence. None of these efforts solved the problems in the Greek system, but all demonstrated an administration committed to helping in many different ways.

The University also offered financial assistance, establishing a \$25,000 loan fund to help houses with renovations and guaranteeing bank loans. And for decades the administration has been subsidizing

Greek houses by releasing sophomores from the residency requirement and thereby shifting revenue from the University to the Greek organizations.

Despite these various efforts by the University, membership continued to decline while alcohol and hazing violations increased. *A recent survey conducted by a national organization found higher levels of heavy drinking and illegal drug use among Greek members at Alfred than non-members.*

Hazing continues to be a problem as well. Some initiates, unhappy with their decision, de-pledge and find themselves harassed and intimidated; ultimately some even have transferred to another university. As a result of hazing and alcohol violations, the University has revoked recognition of one fraternity, and imposed various forms of suspension on three other fraternities and two sororities. Currently 50% of the houses are subject to sanctions.

II) Rationale for the Recommendation

The recommendation of the Task Force to eliminate Greek life is a unanimous one, but it is a difficult one as well. (Not least because 5 of the 8 Task Force members are Greek alumni, three of them at Alfred.) When we began our work we felt there were three possible recommendations we could make: 1) leave Greek life alone, 2) dramatically reform Greek life, or 3) eliminate Greek life. As we began reviewing reports and documents, however, it became abundantly clear that the first alternative was not viable. Further along in our research we concluded that the second alternative would not work either, largely because Greeks are consistently and increasingly in violation of University policies and because so many previous attempts at reform have failed. The only viable option is to eliminate Greek life.

1) To *leave the Greek system alone* would at this point be contrary to the Board and administration's proactive approach to student life, for two reasons. First, some of the houses seem to be in a severe form of denial about the drastic situation they are in. Recent (as well as past) University judicial decisions meting out various punishments are greeted with anger by some and accusations that the administration is trying to eliminate Greek life, rather than recognition that the sanctions are an effort to minimize detrimental if not illegal behavior and perhaps forestall any tragedies. Second, there is too much at stake in the demise of the Greek system to leave it to the vagaries of chance—physical assets like houses and issues like residential life, social activities, and community service must be addressed.

Greek life has a long and valuable history of contributions to Alfred, yet it is incontrovertible from a quantitative point of view that Greek life has been seriously troubled for some three decades. One need only look at the charts showing the precipitous membership decline in Greek organizations (Appendix D) and the minimal interest of incoming freshmen in joining (Appendices F and G) to recognize that based on this persistent trend the system appears to be doomed.

Not only is student interest declining, it is also unevenly distributed in terms of gender, ethnicity and college. Though women are 53% of the student body, only 7% of women are currently Greek. And that percentage will probably continue to decline: less than 1% of Fall 2001 freshman women expressed interest in joining a sorority. Students of color are now 10% of the student body, yet represent a small fraction of Greek membership. Furthermore, the University is committed to expanding international programs (as well as ethnic diversity), yet none of the currently enrolled international students has joined a fraternity or sorority. In addition, interest varies by academic program: students in engineering and business join at about a 22% rate, liberal arts and sciences at an 11% rate, and art student interest is near zero.

Many have argued that qualitatively Greek life is dying a slow death as well. Greeks consistently under-perform versus the all student GPA (Appendix H). Not only do grades drop precipitously during pledging, but also members continue to perform below average throughout their undergraduate years.

Conversely, they far exceed the all-student average for both casual and binge drinking, as measured in the 2001 Core Institute survey (Appendix I). (Although the numbers responding in each sub-group graphed are small, the results are telling.) *While excessive campus drinking is a national problem, AU Greeks drink more and more often than their AU peers.* Furthermore, in the 1997 Core Institute survey, over 90% of students saw “Drinking as central in the social life of fraternities and sororities.” (It is important to note that, by contrast, the average student drinks in moderation: 27% of Alfred’s underage students did not drink alcohol at all and 51% of all Alfred students sampled had consumed alcohol only twice or less in a month.)

Of greatest concern, alcohol is involved in nearly all incidents of violence, injury, rape, and death across university campuses in the U.S. In the words of one person we interviewed, Greek houses are incubators for this type of excessive behavior. Thus, the decline in Greek life at Alfred over the last decade or so is an issue that simply cannot be left to take its own course.

2) A strong case can be made for recommending a *dramatic reform of the system*. A number of the institutions that we studied have done just that, including Middlebury, Hamilton, Union, and Bucknell (as described in Section I). These institutions, with both a longer history and a much larger past and current Greek membership than Alfred, are seeking to maintain that tradition despite the numerous cultural changes that have dramatically altered the collegiate landscape (as reviewed in the previous section and as documented in the spring issue of “Alfred

Magazine.”) Virtually all the schools we reviewed became concerned with their Greek houses in the early 70’s. And all but one or two look at their Greek systems as part of a larger issue—student life, or more specifically residential life, at small schools in (for the most part) small rural towns.

Regardless of whether or not those traditions can be successfully retooled for these times, there are good philosophical arguments for recommending reform of the Greek system. Shouldn’t students be permitted to decide for themselves which organizations to participate in and which to avoid? Why should all houses be punished for the mistakes of one or two? Why should one house be punished for the mistakes of a single member or two?

Just as the original ideals of fraternal living are a far cry from the reality of much contemporary Greek life, so too the philosophical right to choose is compromised by the reality that we discovered at Alfred. *Some students who freely choose to pledge a Greek house and then freely choose to de-pledge for whatever reasons are harassed and intimidated to the point of transferring out of the University.* We were astonished to learn that students may even have to be moved—relocated to safer, undisclosed accommodations—for fear of harm. This was one of the most shocking and abhorrent findings we made during our review of Greek life. One can only imagine the psychological and emotional harm when “sisters” and “brothers” turn against each other; it is especially appalling at an institution that prides itself on a safe and nurturing environment.

It may also seem unfair to punish all houses for the violations of a few. *But in looking back at the history of Greek violations over the last three decades, it is clear that almost every house has had its share of serious violations, including hazing abuses, alcohol overdoses, fights, intimidation, and repeated hospitalizations.* To be sure some violations are far more serious than others and some houses are far more trouble-prone than others, *but the lack of continuity in Greek life leadership inherent in the natural turnover as students leave makes it extremely difficult to maintain*

high standards over any period of time. It also makes it extremely difficult for students who spend only 4-5 years on campus to realize they are part of a larger historical pattern extending over decades. Small groups of students have periodically made genuine efforts to reform from within but over and over those efforts have not been sustained. Houses that are “strong” one year find themselves in deep trouble two or three years later, and vice-versa. Some seem to be perpetually in trouble.

As for the fairness of judging a whole house by the actions of one or two of its members, the evidence indicates that these transgressions are not isolated incidents. Rather, they are repeated behaviors perpetuated by what several emails and letters referred to as a herd mentality among a social group whose members choose to affiliate with each other and to set themselves apart. This pervasive atmosphere, evidenced in the University’s judicial actions, is inconsistent with the mission of the University. Moreover, the lack of responsibility and sense of denial among many Greeks indicate a lack of willingness to institute dramatic, sustainable change for the better.

The Task Force concluded that the philosophical arguments for reform of the Greek system were not convincing, so we looked to the actual experiences of past and current students for reasons to maintain a reformed Greek system. Of the 248 emails and letters we received, only 62 (or 25%) were from alumni, 67% of whom defended Greek life and 33% of whom criticized it. Likewise, the 135 current students who responded (or 54% of the total responses) were about 2/3rd in favor and 1/3rd against the Greek system.

Over and over again we heard from those who favor the system about the virtues of Greek life in terms of bonding, friendship, leadership opportunities, community service and other benefits. Many went so far as to say that their Greek experience was the most important and valuable part of their years at Alfred.

But every one of these virtues seemed to have a corresponding vice on the other side of the coin (Appendix J). Where some experienced familial bonds, others wrote about the mob-like culture. Where some praised the opportunity to meet and live with people from different graduating classes and colleges (not to mention alumni), others condemned the elitist and exclusionary nature of Greek houses. Where some wrote about the opportunity to learn leadership, responsibility and teamwork, others noted how hazing dehumanizes people and bonds of brotherhood lead to mob behavior. Where some praised the focus on academics, others claimed houses had libraries of tests and papers for current members to cheat with.

Some argued in defense of Greek life that there are parties off-campus where underage drinking takes place or illegal drugs are consumed or women are assaulted: why is the University singling out Greeks? The most obvious answer is that the Greek organizations are officially affiliated with the University whereas spontaneous off-campus parties and downtown bars are not. The Greek system is, after all, a *system* with a distinct identity within Alfred University. That recognition invokes certain responsibilities from both the organizations involved and those who belong to them.

Of course, athletic teams are affiliated with the University too, and allegations have been made that they also engage in initiation rites and excessive drinking. An unfortunate case of this type occurred in September 1998 when freshmen on the football team were forced to consume excessive amounts of alcohol and two required hospitalization. 46% of the members of that team were Greek and the parallels are very clear: initiation rites, hazing, and excessive alcohol consumption certainly can be common to both teams and fraternities.

Those football players responsible were dealt with swiftly and decisively, the team forfeited the first game of the year because of the actions of a few members, and the University created a Presidential

Commission on Athletics. It was charged with initiating a full review of the University's athletic program and delivering "recommendations how best to prevent hazing and alcohol abuse."

Among other things, the Commission recommended better integrating varsity athletes into the fabric of student life, creating alternative forms of bonding experiences, and assigning more responsibility to the leaders. From the Athletic Director and coaches down to team captains, specific guidelines were established.

Clearly, there was no double standard here in how the football team was treated versus how Greek houses are treated, notwithstanding claims to the contrary. What is different is that the student athletes have accountability to the University, something lacking at the Greek houses. Not surprisingly, then, hazing and alcohol violations among varsity athletes have been reduced while the numerous previous efforts to reform Greek behavior unsupported by regular and consistent outside supervision have failed.

Just as clearly, there has been no campaign by the administration or the board to eliminate the Greek system. As the previous discussion makes clear, just the opposite is true: over and over again the administration established guidelines and offered financial assistance to strengthen the system. Many chapters and their more recent graduates resisted these as a subtle attempt to gain greater control over the system (precisely what most colleges have found it necessary to do) or dismissed them as too little too late.

Moreover, the administration, with Board approval, has allocated financial resources ranging from construction of fraternity row, guaranteeing loans for new houses, and absorbing infrastructure costs for a new house approved just last May (and still under construction), to lending money for capital improvements at houses and giving sophomore releases from the dorms.

Conversely, and most tellingly, Greek students overall are providing less financial support than in decades past. As we asked the Greek presidents at our meeting with them, “If your members love their respective houses so much, why don’t they live in them?” Most alumni would be surprised to learn, as the Task Force was, that many houses are barely half full, depriving them of badly needed revenue for both operations and capital improvements. Sophomore releases are needed so desperately because only a fraction of Greek juniors and seniors are willing to live in their own houses. Some students report that upperclassmen are unwilling to live in the houses because they want quieter surroundings or their parents have prohibited them from living there because of the houses’ generally poor condition. Whatever the explanation, *as of Spring 2002, 7 of 10 houses had 10 or fewer residents.*

While Greek alumni have been long and consistent donors to the University, in contrast they are not supplying much financial support to their houses. This is consistent with the giving patterns at the other colleges and universities we studied. In addition, the experiences at other universities and Alfred’s own experience suggest that committed alumni will in general support their alma maters when they are forced to make difficult, but reasonable and thoughtful, changes to their student life policies or academic programs.

Perhaps even more surprising, there was very little interest in the fate of the Greek system expressed during the Annual Phon-a-thon. Of the 2,500 alumni among the 3,090 calls made, only 57 (2.3%) asked about the Task Force. 32 were neutral toward the Greek system, 14 were against it, and 11 were in favor of it. And although alumni were encouraged to send their thoughts and opinions to the Task Force (and each letter or email was read by the Task Force members), only 62 alumni chose to do so.

Just as financial support from Greek alumni for their houses is minimal, so too there is little involvement in governance: few chapters have very active alumni advisors or housing boards. Perhaps it is partially

because Alfred has an unusually high percentage of locals with no national organization to provide guidelines and/or training. While those houses with national affiliation are somewhat better off in this regard, even here the record is mixed; both Lambda Chi and ZBT have been shut down by their nationals.

3) In the end *the Task Force believed it had no choice but to eliminate Greek life*. Given the downward trajectory of Greek life in terms of hazing and alcohol abuse violations—50% of the houses are currently under some kind of probation, suspension, or revocation—and the precipitous decline in membership to only 10% of the student body, the Task Force feels very confident that it is making the correct recommendation to the Board. The University’s interest in the health and safety of its students—and in creating the best learning/living environment possible—outweighs the interests of any individual or student organization.

It is understandable that most people reading this report—whether students, alumni, administrators, staff or townspeople—have not had the opportunity afforded the Task Force to look at the bigger picture of Greek life at Alfred and in the Northeast over an extended period of time. Students and alumni, for instance, measure their experience at Alfred in 4 to 5 year snapshots of life on campus. The Task Force very deliberately undertook a thirty-year examination of Alfred’s experiences and national trends; it is clear what that bigger picture dictates.

On occasion a university finds that it must regretfully eliminate an academic program that is no longer attractive to a sufficient number of students to justify the resources required. Alfred has faced such decisions in the past. This is a similar situation and the Task Force gave this review at least as much consideration and care as the University would to review the future of an academic program.

The Task Force concluded that, viewed over the last three decades, the Greek system has:

- 1) Failed to respond as the University itself and the University’s

mission have evolved

- 2) Declined dramatically in numbers
- 3) Diverged from the University's enrollment goals for gender and ethnicity
- 4) Lost organizational vitality
- 5) Allowed deterioration of its facilities
- 6) Continued to permit (if not encourage) risky—even dangerous—behavior, and
- 7) Failed to respond to numerous attempts at reform and support

In summary, the Greek system has suffered a precipitous decline in membership, numerous failed efforts at reform, an increase in serious violations, and the suspension of local chapters by national organizations. Overall, the Greek system is in a prolonged decline that is draining too much time, energy, and resources from the rest of the University. The Task Force easily concluded that it is inappropriate to direct even more resources to a system with declining student interest that is legally independent, lacking any adult presence, bound by secrecy, and free of any real University control.

The most difficult element in all this is eliminating those chapters that have maintained high standards and original ideals, as well as others that have recognized the plight of their system and initiated reforms. Unfortunately they are a minority. We regret very much that some fine Greek chapters will be penalized, while the same fate will befall a few that seem already to have grasped the gravity of the problem and undertaken reforms. (Perhaps a few of these chapters could be converted into or merged with service organizations.) It remains the responsibility of the Task Force to focus on what is best for the University as a whole.

The Task Force wants to emphasize that its recommendation is directed to a *system* of extra-curricular student life that has lost general student interest, become dysfunctional, and demonstrably enabled destructive behavior that its members would not contemplate undertaking

individually. In no way is this recommendation directed against individual students.

The more we studied other campuses and the more we deliberated, the Task Force became increasingly enthusiastic about the transformative possibilities inherent in such a major change in campus life. *Many of the other colleges and universities we reviewed achieved a more cohesive campus and an improved intellectual climate, which in turn attracted better students and faculty.* Indeed, our own Director of Admissions reported to us that most high school students applying to AU express little or no interest in Greek life, and only 4% of the 2001 freshman class indicated they intended to participate in it. Most parents, he went on to say, regard any Greek system as a negative and are relieved to hear how small the Greek population is at Alfred.

The Task Force also recognizes that, early in the tenure of a new president who is boldly exploring what it means to have an “Alfred University education,” restructuring students’ residential and social life represents a golden opportunity to advance the University’s mission. The changes we foresee are replete with possibilities one administrator called the most exciting in three decades. This recommendation affords Alfred University an opportunity to reclaim its commitment to being a safe, caring place while simultaneously reinforcing its academic mission. The strengths of a Greek system can be preserved, its weaknesses eliminated, and the resulting opportunity realized.

III) Suggested Changes in Student Life

While student life over the last decade has improved dramatically at AU, as evidenced by student satisfaction surveys and the numerous regional and national awards won by the office of Student Affairs, the elimination of the Greek system at Alfred University is replete with exciting possibilities for even more improvements. It will help address the serious health and safety problems of drinking, illegal drugs, and hazing endemic

to Greek life on the one hand, and on the other hand it will literally change the landscape of student housing and social life, thereby creating opportunities for the entire student body.

The other colleges studied by the Task Force reported that, as is true at Alfred, Greek houses play a prominent role in campus social life to varying degrees, and social life—along with off-campus housing—is what distinguishes them from other student organizations. Other groups have social activities, focused around academic achievement, community service, athletics, religion, or dozens of other purposes. While it is true that some affinity groups, like the Honors Program, Hillel, and Language House, have a dedicated residence, only the Greeks combine a social focus and a house, thereby holding a unique place in student life. If our recommendation is accepted, the elimination of Greek life will leave a hole in the social and residential life of our University.

But it will also create an opportunity to fill that hole by eliminating that which is negative about Greek life and preserving that which is positive. In keeping with the University's mission to value diversity and tolerance, and "to develop our students' ability to think critically, communicate clearly . . . [and] respond creatively to change," the Task Force hopes that the changes brought about in response to its recommendation will focus and energize the campus community to compensate for the lost housing and social life by replacing them with housing and programs that serve as many students as possible rather than a select group, and that do so in a safe, healthy, and economical way.

There are many factors that favor a change in student life at this time, among them:

- A new president seeking to redefine the meaning of "an Alfred education."
- A Board of Trustees profoundly committed to a strong future for the University.

- A small local community deeply dependent on the University for its economic health and hungry for more interaction.
- Key administrators with tremendous experience, knowledge, and talent dealing with residential life at a small rural campus.
- A current climate of financial challenges to higher education in general and Alfred in particular which call for more efficient and equitable use of resources.
- The opportunity to gain increased support and respect from friends of Alfred, alumni, and the world of higher education, all of whom may view a more vibrant living/learning community as enhancing the mission of the University.
- The opportunity to continue attracting even better students and faculty (which has been accomplished at some of the other colleges we studied).

The reports from other colleges and universities reveal certain similar actions undertaken to preserve the strengths of fraternal life and eliminate the weaknesses. The Task Force herewith presents some of the better innovations and changes as suggestions for possible implementation at Alfred.

1) *Purchase those Greek houses that can be renovated by the University into special interest houses or other special housing needs (graduate students, faculty, etc.)* Whether they eliminated or dramatically reformed their Greek systems, nearly all the colleges we studied purchased the fraternity and sorority houses on or near their campuses. They required Greeks to live in college dorms or allowed them to stay in Greek houses under much tighter controls. This gave other student groups an equal chance at what was considered to be more desirable off-campus housing while simultaneously exerting more University control over the living conditions of their Greek students.

2) *Increase the residency requirement to at least three and possibly four years.* It is clear that students benefit from a more structured

residential environment after they leave home—something almost totally lacking in Greek houses. A longer residency requirement would bring students under the guidance of the Residence Life system and other caring and trained adults. Various forms of residential life should be offered to accommodate the various needs of students with different tastes, interests, and personal habits. (Students can always be granted releases if they earn them.)

3) *Raise the standard for dorm releases.* In an effort to help the Greek system financially, the University has regularly given sophomores releases to live in fraternities and sororities. Sophomores are generally less mature than junior and seniors and yet they are moving into housing with no adult supervision and many distractions. The University should raise the bar: to earn a release from the residency requirement a student should be at least a junior, have a GPA that indicates he/she can handle the academic work in the less structured environment, and have no record of serious disciplinary violations. The University might also consider withdrawing releases from those students who do not live up to an AU standard of behavior for off-campus living.

4) *Create an Alfred University set of standards for off-campus housing which landlords must meet or students will not be granted a release to live there.* The University should work with local landlords and the village to implement such a code, which would afford students better independent living experiences while simultaneously bringing more students into the community. (Health and safety inspections would, of course, remain under the jurisdiction of local and state authorities.)

5) *Expand the number of special interest houses, each with a distinctive educational focus.* These have been a great success and should be expanded by utilizing some of the acquired fraternity and sorority houses. As in the Greek houses, students living in special interest houses should have opportunities for leadership and the responsibility of running the house, balancing a budget, scheduling events, and coordinating the

activities and living space. Special interest houses also enable students who are otherwise shy in social situations to meet people and make friends on the basis of a common interest, affording them the opportunity to experience the close bonding that is one of the virtues of Greek living.

6) *Continue to promote community service.* Another virtue of Greek life is the emphasis on community service, which will help the surrounding communities, enrich students' lives, and (in the words of AU's Mission Statement) prepare "them for a life of achievement and leadership." At some schools community service is a requirement for graduation.

7) *Create on-campus social space that allows for alcohol consumption under tight controls.* With the loss of fraternity parties, social activities will need to be restructured. It is clear from the letters and emails the Task Force received, even from those critical of Greek life, that the system provides a necessary social alternative to the growing number of excellent on-campus activities. Almost every one of the 20 colleges we studied has created social space on campus for any and all organizations to use on a first come/first served basis, space that includes serving alcohol by third party vendors who are responsible for carding students.

These suggestions combine the best of what we read about at other colleges and our own ideas. The goals are to create a more positive student life experience, utilize University resources more effectively in the service of all the students, and support the economic vitality of the area.