

## The Harsh Reality

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Membership reviews can be one of the most devastating things to happen to a fraternity or sorority. However, they are often the difference between remaining a chapter and losing it all together. They are the last resort for universities and headquarters when trying to salvage the good that is left in an organization. They would not put forth the time and money to review each individual member if they felt all hope was lost. Instead, they would disband the organization all together.

My name is Andrew Baker, and I am the President of the Epsilon Iota Chapter of Pi Kappa Alpha Fraternity at Southeast Missouri State University. During the Spring 2012 semester, my chapter underwent a drastic membership review. Before the review, we were a 99 man chapter. After a week-long visit from headquarters, we were left with 46 members. That means that over 50% of our fraternity "brothers" were given early alumni status and became unaffiliated with the fraternity until after graduation.

From a leadership standpoint, it was a great opportunity to remove members who did not contribute or who continuously failed to meet the fraternity requirements. However, the most overlooked aspect of membership reviews is the aftermath. Removing people from a fraternity is only the first step because what you create is a completely new "fraternity" on campus with no rules. The brothers who were dismissed tend to stand together because they all went through the same experience. This creates problems for the active chapter for two reasons: the removed men are still friends with many of the men who remain active, and there is no way to discipline early alumni for any actions that may reflect back on the chapter. And, when they still have T-shirts and stickers on their cars, many fail to realize they are no longer active members.

Looking back, just one year later, I see several opportunities for improvement regarding the membership review process. The members who were removed from the active roster were given "early alumni" status. This means that they were unable to participate in any fraternity functions until they graduate. Many of these individuals continued to associate themselves with the chapter, and the meaning of "early alumni" soon turned to "alumni." Some of our issues may have been avoided if the "early alumni" status was better explained to not only the affected individuals but to the chapter as well.

Another aspect that was handled differently than I expected was headquarters' follow-up contact after the membership review. They did a very good job with the appeals process for members who deserved a second chance; however, there was no real guidance from headquarters otherwise. I expected monthly check-ups, emails, or calls to stay in contact, but there was little communication to see the improvements we had made. What we really needed was a sense of direction.

Internally, the aftermath of the membership review was a blessing but also a struggle. In our case, most of the younger members made it through the review or were at least temporarily suspended. We were a smaller chapter with few experienced leaders, and we were faced with the difficult task of rebuilding a 50-year-old, "anchor" chapter in the Southeast Missouri State University fraternity and sorority community.



After your chapter goes through a membership review, many feel as if there is nothing to lose. If you fail, you join the other half of your brothers who were let go; but if you succeed, you gain the benefit of knowing you are responsible for saving a chapter who has traditionally been strong on campus. Fortunately for us, we have succeeded.

The membership review could have been a devastating experience, demoralizing what was left of the chapter. However, we embraced this opportunity as a way to develop ourselves into an excellent fraternity. As time goes on, the early alumni have slowly started to graduate, making it easier for the chapter to hold social events, brotherhoods, and so on.

We have taken young new members and helped them grow into leaders of the chapter. Our overall GPA has increased, and we have outgrown old stereotypes. Most importantly, we were able to brand ourselves with a new image in the Southeast fraternity and sorority community, which is a rare opportunity for even the most well-established chapters.

Although membership reviews do not guarantee future success, the Epsilon Iota Chapter of the Pi Kappa Alpha Fraternity has proven it can be done. Although I feel that membership reviews should be a last resort before losing the chapter entirely, the more seriously fraternities and sororities choose to take a review, the greater the outcome will be. I have the opinion that membership reviews are often thought of as an automatic problem solver, which is completely false given the plethora of new problems they create. If the time ever comes to have a review, then I highly recommend taking whatever actions are necessary to ensure that the proper changes are made.