

Brotherhood, Our Substance of Choice

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Why Phi Delta Theta Implemented Alcohol-Free Housing

The alcohol-free housing initiative was adopted following years of declining recruitment figures, poor academic performance by our members, deteriorating living facilities, and the alienation of our alumni base. At the forefront of this decision was the alcohol-dominated culture that existed on college campuses and within our chapters that was diminishing the principles upon which Phi Delta Theta was founded.

In 1997, the Phi Delta Theta General Council announced its alcohol-free housing policy. Chapters were given more than three years to implement this paradigm shift on their campus, and all properties were required to be alcohol-free by the implementation date of July 1, 2000.

Since the implementation, Phi Delta Theta has undergone transformational change and has become a noticed leader within the fraternal world. The policy, deemed by many as a factor that could be the end of the organization, has benefited Phi Delta Theta in many ways. Most importantly, the culture it has created is attracting values-based men who are placed in safe environments where they can become the greatest versions of themselves.

Positive Reform: 20 Years of Alcohol-Free Housing

Friendship, Sound Learning, and Rectitude are the three Cardinal Principles of Phi Delta Theta. However, it seemed for many of our chapters, these sacred principles had taken a backseat and were no longer the focus. Brotherhood in our chapters was suffering and apathy was rampant. Alcohol-free housing has allowed Phi Delta Theta to regain focus on the principles upon which we were founded.

While definitions vary, most would agree rectitude can be explained as “doing the right thing.” Focusing on rectitude as the foundation for the transition to alcohol-free housing, we expect our members and alumni to hold one another accountable. This transformation was deemed as “getting out of the bar business and back into the fraternity-brotherhood business.” In 2000, the fraternity had 165 chapters, and in 2018, over 190 chapters in North America. Phi Delta Theta is indeed growing and spreading our cardinal principles to a greater number of students. In 2000, the fraternity had about eight thousand undergraduate members. Now, we have nearly fourteen thousand members. In 2000, the average chapter size was forty-four members; today, the average chapter size is sixty-nine members.

Academic Performance

Before the transition to alcohol-free housing, overall academic performance was weak, at best, as many of our members failed to meet chapter and university academic requirements. Removing alcohol from our chapter houses has created an improved learning environment and our member's academic performance in the classroom proves this. In 2000, our average chapter GPA was 2.7. Today, the average chapter GPA is 3.06. In 2017, Phi Delta Theta increased its minimum chapter GPA from 2.5 to 2.75 or the All Men's Average.

Recruitment

A culture dominated by alcohol had curtailed the ability to recruit campus leaders and had aggravated fraternity/sorority life professionals to the point of distrust and alienated much of our alumni base. Removing alcohol from our chapter houses has created a renewed focus on recruiting values-based members and a surge in demand for Phi Delta Theta memberships. In 2000, 3,045 new members joined the organization. During 2016-17, 5,358 new members were initiated, a 76% increase.

Risk Reduction & Safety

Alcohol-related incidents, including deaths, sexual assaults, fights, hazing, and mental health issues had become all too common. These horrific incidents became a terrible financial burden and were a major stain on a fraternity striving for the development of strong moral character. Alcohol-free housing has resulted in safer environments for our members and guests. From 2000-2017, our average number of annual claims has decreased by 61%. The *To Do What Ought To Be Done* educational initiative has introduced important bystander intervention education and communications to undergraduate Phis, including a *Be Your Brother's Keeper* online educational module. Finally, the fraternity has implemented a successful Amnesty Program, which offers an opportunity for any chapter that is concerned with their commitment to the Phi Delta Theta Risk Management Policy and wishes to seek help in developing a more positive values-based experience for their members and new members in accordance with the Cardinal Principles and risk management policies of the Fraternity.

Chapter House Maintenance

Once majestic fraternity houses had become shells of their former selves. They had been trashed by the continuous wear and tear that came with weekend after weekend of parties and vandalism by members and non-members. Alcohol-free housing has enhanced our facilities and their ability to attract me to live in them. Currently, 125 of our chapters have quality housing facilities, which represents 64% of our current chapters.

Volunteer Engagement

Alcohol-free housing has brought our alumni and trusted colleagues back to serve our chapters, resulting in strong operations organization-wide. Since 2000, there has been a 203% increase in chapter advisors, with each chapter averaging 5.97 members per advisory board.

The Cost of Membership

Today, Phi Delta Theta boasts one of the lowest per man liability insurance cost among fraternities, making the Phi Delt experience more affordable. Currently, the All-fraternity Liability Insurance Cost per member is \$169. Phi Delta Theta is at \$90 per member.

Phi Delta Theta is proof that a fraternity with alcohol-free housing can not only survive on today's college campuses, but can thrive and excel. While the Fraternity still faces critical issues associated with alcohol-free housing, we have responded swiftly to take corrective measures such as was done in 2017 after Louisiana State University prospective member Max Gruver perished. We believe all issues can be resolved with time and the commitment of the fraternity's alumni and partner volunteers, high education professionals, parents and our student leaders.

Robert Biggs is from the Georgia Epsilon Chapter of Phi Delta Theta and graduated from Georgia Southern University in 1976. He is the Executive Vice President and CEO of Phi Delta Theta Fraternity and the President of the Phi Delta Theta Foundation. Bob has an MBA from Xavier University and has served on the GHQ staff for 42 years. Bob has been a Certified Association Executive since 1986.