

Social Pause: 101 Days

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In 2017 and recent years, many fraternity and sorority communities, both in Indiana and nationally, have implemented a halt, suspension, ban, or other cessation of all or certain activities within fraternity/sorority communities. Ball State is one of those campuses. In partnership with the University's Interfraternity Council (IFC) chapter and council leadership, a social pause was implemented, not due to one single incident but rather a trend or a pattern of behavior that was not acceptable or consistent with our University Beneficence Pledge. We came together to work *together* on addressing these issues.

Leadership from the Division of Student Affairs and Enrollment Services, myself as Director of Greek Life, and our council and chapter leadership within the IFC worked together on this decision. There were many things to discuss. From an administrator perspective we considered the following questions:

- What were the facts?
- What patterns had/were appearing in behavior or policy violations?
- How long had these patterns continued?
- What individual chapter sanctions were implemented at present?
- Who has been impacted by this behavior?
- What would a pause in socials (with and without alcohol) look like, and what would we as administrators need to do to provide education and continue this conversation?

After deliberation, the Ball State University Interfraternity Council agreed to a social pause spanning 101 days. Our pause began on October 23, 2017, prior to Halloween weekend. While chapter leadership seemed relieved there would be no Halloween events, the general student reaction was as expected. Social media was vibrant, and there were many opinions shared. Also, campus and local media picked up this story.

The North American Interfraternity Conference (NIC) was very helpful in the days following the beginning of the pause. Having our NIC Vice President of Campus Relations speak with me and then relay information to headquarters staff was helpful and appreciated.

Much of the back-and forth communication was by phone, some via email. Many chapter advisors and/or headquarters staff were calling to offer support or to ask clarifying questions. Student leaders communicated with their headquarter staff as well; sharing for review the joint letter the University and IFC chapter and council leadership would sign eventually.

Communication extended from our Divisional leadership to alumni and advisors as well. This included phone calls and a phone conference with several involved alumni from IFC and Panhellenic chapters.

Personally and professionally, I have learned a great deal from this time. Lessons learned include the need to analyze social media and what the news crews are reporting, and lean in to conversations with community leaders. I had some of the best and most honest conversations of my career in the days that followed our meeting with the IFC chapter and council leaders. It was especially interesting to see many chapter presidents were honest, passionate, and ready to move forward.

The days following the announcement of the pause were challenging for all concerned. Some students needed reassurance or help addressing the more vocally negative members of their chapters while others needed someone to be upset with. As the Director of Greek Life and IFC advisor, I became that person for many students. It was a difficult experience. However, the outpouring of support I received — from colleagues and departments across campus, from friends in the field, from headquarters staff, advisors, and the NIC — empowered me to be the leader the campus and Greek community needed. No one ever said being a fraternity/sorority advisor would be easy. I just kept reminding myself of this. I also knew I was supported by my supervisor and divisional leadership.

As we began providing the prescribed educational sessions for the community, we learned most of the members were engaged, honest, and asked excellent questions of the presenters. We learned some of the programs needed to be institutionalized within our community education after the pause is lifted. We also learned there were more stakeholders in the pause than expected. As we approach the lift date of our social pause, our Panhellenic Association leadership has begun working with the IFC leadership regarding safety at events moving forward. Our student leaders are increasingly vocal about ideas to add safety to events and to think about socials, beyond those with alcohol. The community is engaging in conversations about campus culture and are brainstorming ways to impact and address issues campus wide.

One campus advisor reached out to me prior to their own pause regarding lessons learned and advice to share. I offered that it is hard to disagree with anything where the safety of students and members are at the core of the decision - remembering this will help you to focus beyond the initial reactions. Have a plan for communication with all stakeholders and partners and be okay with reactions; they will be polarizing. Leadership is hard at times, not just for students but for professionals. However, my continued challenge to our Association members is that we must be leaders for the students and for the institutions or headquarters at which we work. We cannot shy away from hard conversations or decisions; in fact, facing those makes us better professionals.