

Message Points

Greek Life New Directions – New Opportunities
Strategic Communications and External Relations
Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute
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BACKGROUND

On Feb. 25, members of the Division of Student Life will join students, alumni, faculty, and staff to update several new strategies developed to enhance the role of Greek Life as a critical element to the undergraduate experience. The *New Directions – New Opportunities* is designed to elevate Greek Life to the forefront of student life by building a Greek program that will serve as a national model of excellence. This document is intended to answer questions that are likely to arise about the details of the new initiative.

IF ASKED ABOUT

The details of the New Directions – New Opportunities initiative

- To further enhance the undergraduate student experience, the updated *New Directions – New Opportunities* initiatives seeks to renew a commitment for the fundamental founding values and principals upon which Rensselaer fraternities and sororities are based. These are also in keeping with Rensselaer’s Student Life Performance Plan as a key to elevate Greek life to a national model of excellence.
- Since the April 2006 presentation of DOSO’s New Directions for Greek Life, a significant effort occurred between May 2006 and August 2007 to review and assess the initial series of New Directions by a broader representation of Greek constituents including undergraduate members, Fraternity and Sorority administration, Rensselaer administration, and alumni. Outcomes to date include a stronger link between Greek life and the undergraduate plan, specifically for residential living-learning communities, improving rush and new member recruitment process, and addressing health and safety issues associated with alcohol consumption by revising Rensselaer’s Alcohol and Other Drugs Policy
- Unintended outcomes through the thoughtful review process includes implementing a Rensselaer Good Samaritan Policy, Fraternity and Sorority Social Management Manual, and a process for reinstatement of full recognition of a fraternity and sorority.
- The overarching vision for Greek life is to enhance its role as a critical and necessary element to the undergraduate experience. This will improve Rensselaer’s visibility and attractiveness, enabling opportunities to increase applications and sustain enrollment, and to further preserve Greek Life at Rensselaer.

Why the initiative was developed

- Nearly two years ago, Rensselaer leadership, recognized a need to restore a sustainable Greek Life community. At the time, obstacles related to declining membership and a

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rising number of incidents involving high-risk alcohol consumption affected an increasing number of chapters leading to multi-year chapter suspensions.

- The *New Directions-New Opportunities* represent a major step on the part of the Institute, undergraduates and alumni not just preserve, but significantly improve, Greek life at Rensselaer. It was developed with broad collaboration and input from students, alumni, and many other key constituents.

When the plan will be implemented

- Some aspects of the plan are already underway. Examples include:
 - **Living-Learning Community:** Sigma Phi Epsilon has already embraced their national chapter's effort to facilitate and support residential learning units. The fraternity has begun the process of identifying a faculty member to serve as a resident scholar. They have also begun renovation of a section of their house to serve as a residential learning unit. Delta Phi will assist Rob Chernow, vice provost for entrepreneurship in various areas to develop a living-learning community.
 - **Endowed Scholarships:** Delta Tau Delta Fraternity is working to create an endowed scholarship to support students. The fraternity is also considering the development of a residential learning community in engineering and/or physical sciences.
 - **The International Greek Life Experience:** An effort is underway to create international opportunities for members of Greek Life fraternities and sororities, in collaboration with alumni networks. This will provide members of the Greek Life community with an opportunity to expand leadership, service, and philanthropy activities outside of the United States.

The changes to the alcohol policy

- The alcohol policy for Greek Life will be aligned with the Institute Policy. Rensselaer's goal is to systematically change the culture that tolerates underage alcohol consumption, not just minimize exposure to consequences. Institute leaders aim to develop an alcohol policy that is clear and consistent, in an effort to inform and educate individuals of the risk factors associated with alcohol misuse and abuse.
- Rensselaer will adopt The Good Samaritan Policy. The Good Samaritan Policy is part of a national trend to seek assistance for individuals suffering from intoxication due to the misuse of alcohol or drugs while reducing the threat of Institute judicial sanctions. The purpose is to seek help first and foremost without having to worry about 'getting oneself or organization into trouble'. By widely publicizing and adopting a Good Samaritan

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Policy at Rensselaer, students can be taught how to assume a supportive role as they come to the aid of their peers and significant others.

How the initiative impacts rush and new member recruitment

- The new member rush and recruitment process will be revised. The first two weeks of the semester will serve as an opportunity to recognize Rensselaer's Greek Life fraternities and sororities as a community, then a formal Rush period will showcase individual chapters. The goal is to meet the Rush and new member education requirements by the end of the semester instead of the traditional longer period that goes longer than one semester. This new process will allow Greeks and non-Greeks the opportunity to adjust to Rensselaer while forming new friendships, adapting to a new social environment, and selecting members who are better informed and acclimated to being Rensselaer students.

The history of Greek Life at Rensselaer

- Greeks have an exceptionally long history at Rensselaer, with the first fraternities being established soon after the founding in 1824, and several Alpha chapters still in residence today. To date, Rensselaer is home to 37 fraternities and sororities, boasting more than 1600 members.
- Members of fraternities and sororities have higher retention and graduation rates than non-Greeks, and they also exceed the all-campus rate. Factors that contribute to this effort include participation in leadership, philanthropy, community service activities, independent living opportunities, and strong connections to alumni.