



FRMT NEWS

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PREVENTION PARADOX INDEED: HOW GREEK ORGANIZATIONS ARE FUNDAMENTALLY CHANGING THE CULTURE OF HIGH-RISK DRINKING

By: Brandon Busted, Founder of Outside The Classroom and an Honor Initiate of Alpha Tau Omega

I became Greek when I was 28, roughly 10 years later than most. I attended a top-ranked university with a large Greek population, was a Division I athlete, and was class president. My father was Greek; he was president of his fraternity and later served on their international board. In many respects, I was a perfect candidate for Greek-letter membership. But I never gave it a consideration. Why? All I saw in Greek organizations was drinking – a lot of it. And I didn't care to have any part of it.

Since graduating from college, I have built a career in higher education policy and public health related to the "binge" drinking issue. As the founder and CEO of Outside The Classroom, developers of AlcoholEdu, I'm now at least partially responsible for the education of more than 1.5 million college students to date, including 36% of all freshmen in America this fall. I never intended to make this a career, but it is the most fascinating challenge I could have undertaken. Let me be clear: I do drink alcohol. But I didn't have my first drink until a month before my 22nd birthday, effectively graduating from high school and college without ever drinking – one of my best decisions.

When I embarked on this work, I had a pretty negative outlook about the ability of Greek-letter organizations to fundamentally shed the image of drunken social clubs. I heard that men's fraternities are the second riskiest organizations to insure in the world, behind only hazardous waste disposal companies. Ouch. But after looking at the data, my viewpoint was altered.

Why did I become Greek at age 28? And why do I write this article now? Because I see incredibly promising signs of success within and across Greek-letter organizations on a national level. These signs point to hard work on behalf of national leaders and undergraduates. They point to a new breed of student coming to college campuses. They point to a new vision – dare I say the original vision – of Greek-letter organizations. And they tell us all we better get on board the train lest we get passed by.

Before I tell you about the promising signs and their implications, it's very important that we all consider the still painful reality of Greeks and alcohol. Greek students drink more than non-Greeks, and fraternity houses are still the riskiest of all housing options on campus. We cannot hide from these facts. They should be motivation to continue our good work. But that's where the pessimism and negativity ends. Let me show you what promise lies ahead:

- Since 2003, the Greek-letter organizations using AlcoholEdu with all their new members (which include some 2,300 chapters nationwide, or about 50% of all Greeks) have reduced binge drinking by a whopping 28.3%.
- Though the binge rate of Greeks is still higher than the average college student population, the respective rates are now very close – 48% vs. 44%, respectively. When the Harvard School of Public Health last ran their national drinking survey in 2001, the Greek rate was in the low to mid-60% range.
- Living in a fraternity or sorority house is more protective of a student's choice NOT to drink than living in regular dorms or – get this – substance-free halls.

Promising indeed. So, you might ask: what's going on here and why are we seeing these new trends? First, there is a simple supply and demand answer. In the past five years, there have been an increasing number of students coming to college as non-drinkers. In order for any student organization (including Greek ones) to be successful in recruiting the best members, they have to recognize the market demographics and demands of the pool they recruit from...and cater to it. With more non-drinkers coming to college, fraternities and sororities need to hone their marketing to a new breed of student and make some real changes to their organizations to accommodate them.

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Prevention Paradox

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Second, the same attributes of Greek-letter organizations that drive unhealthy behaviors are actually strengths when it comes to driving healthy behaviors. Close-knit social ties and friendships, shared living quarters, and naturally competitive instincts all drive high-risk drinking. They also can achieve the opposite. When we achieve real brotherhood, it's about deep, meaningful relationships, not surface ones propped up by alcohol. Real brotherhood is supportive of the choices of fellow brothers. When a non-drinker joins a fraternity, he is supported in that decision – at least more so than if he lives in a regular dorm or even a substance-free hall. On the surface, it's hard to believe, but real friendships make a difference.

Third, making a dent in the binge drinking issue on college campuses is actually easier than we've ever believed. A considerable amount of research has uncovered what I believe is the key to tackling this issue. It's something called the "prevention paradox," and what it says is that the majority of negative consequences from drinking DO NOT come from the highest risk drinkers. Students in the light, moderate, or infrequent binge drinker categories account for more negative consequences (such as fights, injuries, property damage, and ER visits) than do frequent heavy drinkers. At an individual level, a student who drinks 10 drinks is indeed at more risk than a student who drinks 5. Here's the twist: on the average campus, there are three times more students who drink at the 5-drink level than the 10-drink level. And as we all know, five drinks of alcohol still carries some risk. So the sheer numbers add up to the "moderate" drinkers creating more problems overall.

Here's the really cool part, though: very small changes in the choices of moderate drinkers make a bigger impact than very big changes in the choices of frequent binge drinkers. Someone reducing their drinking from 5 drinks to 4 is actually reducing their risk more than someone reducing their drinking from 15 drinks to 10. The point is that 10 drinks is still very risky, but the "hockey stick" part of the risk curve occurs around the 5-drink range. I find it to be a very encouraging thought that tackling this issue is about getting moderate drinkers (who are certainly rational people) to make modest changes in their drinking.

The rise in non-drinkers coming to college, the natural attributes of Greek-letter organizations, and the prevention paradox all explain why Greeks are making progress. But the core explanation is that they have made a real effort to change. With strong risk-management policies and training, values-based education and mentorship, and programs like AlcoholEdu, progress is being made rather quickly. In fact, Greeks are leading the charge at this stage of things.

In January of this year, leaders from various men's and women's fraternities, including Wynn Smiley, CEO of Alpha Tau Omega; Marilyn Fordham, National Panhellenic Conference

Delegate, Delta Gamma Fraternity; Cari Cook, Executive Director of Delta Delta Delta; and Tom Goodale, former Executive Director of Sigma Alpha Epsilon, held a summit at Outside The Classroom to discuss next steps. Those steps included the creation of an entirely new program for Greek-letter organizations, called GreekLifeEdu, which is used by national organizations, many of which are represented on your campus. It builds on the great foundation of AlcoholEdu and adds key components around sexual assault and hazing prevention. The leadership of these participants is indicative of the leadership across Greek organizations to address these issues. And like the promising trends we are seeing, they give me great hope that things are moving in a decidedly better, more positive direction when it comes to Greeks and alcohol.

In terms of what this all means for a Greek community, a chapter, or an individual member, I think it boils down to a few simple opportunities. The first is to recruit and retain more members who do not want alcohol to be a defining part of their college experience. It will soon be a competitive advantage to your chapters

to have more members like this. The second opportunity is to re-brand Greek membership – away from the alcohol-fueled image of "Animal House" and toward a point of being cited by college students as their most memorable and meaningful relationship or experience. The final opportunity lies in appreciating that behaviors can change, if we focus on the middle of the bell curve. Don't let the extremes in our chapters drive what we do. There will always be "that guy." But "that guy" doesn't need to set the standard for the entire

organization, nor does the chapter leadership need to cater to him and his often very loud, but very minority opinions. The majority of our membership includes sensible people who want to succeed in life, want to do the right thing, want to find their passion in life, and seek meaning in their relationships, study, and work. If we stay focused on them, the extremes will soon become a thing of the past.

And, like me, becoming Greek post-college, I say better late than never!

IT'S SOMETHING CALLED THE "PREVENTION PARADOX," AND WHAT IT SAYS IS THAT THE MAJORITY OF NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES FROM DRINKING DO NOT COME FROM THE HIGHEST RISK DRINKERS.

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The risks of **DOGS** at chapter properties

By Bobbi Larsen, Education Consultant, Willis HRH and an initiate of Alpha Chi Omega

Each year, 800,000 Americans seek medical attention for dog bites. Man's best friend can create quite a headache when placed in the environment of the chapter, and can generate unwanted risk for both the individual owner and the fraternity/sorority chapter.

According to the Insurance Information Institute, in 2007 dog bites cost insurers \$356.2 million, up 10.5 percent from the previous year. The average cost of dog bite claims increased by 11.5 percent to \$24,511 during the same period. The number of claims paid by insurers has remained relatively stable over the past three years at 14,295 in 2005, 14,661 in 2006 and 14,531 in 2007. Liability claims, including dog bite claims, accounted for about 5 percent of all homeowners insurance losses in 2006 (the latest data available at <http://www.iii.org/media/hottopics/insurance/dogbite/>).

Unfortunately, a dog in the college environment is often out of place. The necessity of providing attention to the animal as well as the expenses of food and proper care are often beyond the ability of the common college student. While direct neglect may not be intended, the dog can often be stressed by such an environment increasing the likelihood the dog will bite or threaten guests and members.



House corporation boards should prohibit pets in chapter houses in housing and lease agreements. Even keeping a dog or pet for a short period of time can expose a fraternity/sorority to an otherwise avoidable risk, no matter how well-intentioned the individual or chapter watching the animal may be. In addition to the safety concerns, issues of allergies and sanitation can also cause problems. Other student living environments such as private apartments and dorms typically prohibit pets as well.

Over the years, many states have passed laws with stiff penalties for owners of dogs that cause serious injuries or deaths. In about one-third of states, owners are "strictly liable" for their dogs' behavior, while in the rest of the country they are liable only if they knew or should have known their dogs had a propensity to bite (known as the "one free bite" principle).

Examples can be found where dog bites in chapter houses have resulted in litigation being brought against the fraternity, chapter, house corporation and members. Each example can be applied to a number of situations and conditions found on most college campuses.

The chapter president of a college fraternity chose to house the dog of a friend while she was out of town for a two week period. During this time the dog bit two people, both a fraternity member and a guest. The guest was another friend of the president who reached down to pet the dog and was bit in the hand.



The chapter president was notified by campus authorities that dogs were not allowed under University policy and the animal needed to be removed. This notice was received roughly one week prior to the first bite with no action taken by the chapter.

In this case, a lawsuit was filed against the owner of the dog, chapter president, and 30 members of the chapter by the second bite victim. The fraternity president was sued in his capacity as president, noting he was an agent acting within the purpose and scope of the fraternity at all times.

Because the chapter president had posted a "beware of dog" poster on his door and had informed outside parties that he was housing the animal, he was determined to be the keeper of the dog at the time of the bite. The home owner's policy of the chapter president's parents was brought into litigation. The total settlement, which covered the associated medical expenses, legal fees and damages sought, resulted in a total cost of nearly \$20,000 to the fraternity.

In another suit, a fraternity was found liable for a dog bite after demonstrating ownership of a dog in various ways: the dog's photograph appeared in local chapter's composite photograph among members of fraternity with title "mascot," he lived at the fraternity house, the fraternity paid for his "shots and stuff," and the fraternity sent a representative to pay his fines on several, perhaps five, other occasions that the dog was found to be running at large.

Keeping a dog or other animal on campus or at a fraternity/sorority chapter house is often well intentioned. However, the resources of most college students are limited in the ability to provide a positive and healthy environment for the animal, creating risk and liability issues for the organization.

While most college students would enjoy an extra companion to keep their minds off of exams and coursework, the risks associated with doing so are greater than all would like. House Corporations should act to prohibit pets from the chapter facility.

Sources

<http://www.iii.org/media/hottopics/insurance/dogbite/>
<http://www.lawskills.com/case/ga/id/22990/>

Website links for educational review and research:

Center for Disease Control and Prevention: www.cdc.gov

Dog Bite Law: www.dogbitelaw.com

Animal Legal & Historical Center: www.animallaw.info

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