

IS THE SUN SETTING ON THE GREEKS?

For almost as long as anyone can remember someone has been sounding the death knell for the Greek system. For whatever reason, the bell continues to toll, and in many parts of the country the peal is getting louder.

- The latest issue of Pi Kappa Alpha's magazine outlines a new membership education program designed to make pledging a worthwhile experience rather than a subservient one to counteract what the author calls "discordant anachronisms" of pledging.
- Last year at Washburn University in Topeka, Alpha Kappa Lambda had a new house but had to close it because they couldn't fill it.
- In 1968 three fraternities closed at the University of Michigan.
- At Columbia College, the men's undergraduate division of Columbia University, Alpha Delta Phi has opened its meal plan to non-members; Phi Epsilon Pi, absorbed nationally by Zeta Beta Tau, initiated four women and also rents rooms to women non-members; the ZBT local, a synonym for stability and affluence, has closed; most fraternities take in outside roomers; a big membership is 40.
- Ten years ago the University of Pennsylvania had 11 sororities with 526 members including 190 pledges. This year there are five sororities with 89 members including a total of 15 pledges. Tri-Delt, Theta and Alpha Epsilon Phi closed last year; only three sororities took part in rush; Chi Omega and Kappa Kappa Gamma have given up their houses; the three remaining, Kappa Delta, Phi Sigma Sigma and Sigma Delta Tau, have indicated their inability to stay on campus without outside help and already have non-member residents occupying half of each house.

At OU things seem to be different and happier. In every era there are Greek organizations having trouble of one kind or another. A local may go out of existence because of disciplinary problems. Poor financial advisement may cause ruin. And sometimes, for no apparent reason, enthusiasm in the house wanes, or sometimes the chapter never gets firmly established to begin with.

But such events at OU are not symptoms of overall sickness in the Greek system. They are the natural occurrences in the year to year life of the system as a whole.

The question then is whether OU is so different from those schools where the Greek system is in real trouble or whether OU is just running behind in feeling this latest aspect of critical change on the campus.

To examine the Greek question Sooner magazine editorial assistant Val Pippis interviewed the presidents of Panhellenic and the Interfraternity Council, Cindy Burner and Ron Redus. Here is their analysis.

Sooner — In other parts of the country the Greek system seems to be failing. People just aren't joining fraternities or sororities any more. Do you think this is a trend that will or is affecting this campus?

Redus — Attitudes are changing, and I think the Greek system as a whole is going to have to change along with those attitudes if it expects to attract the student of today.

The Greek system is going to have to drop some of the dead wood that it has been carrying along—some of the pledge programs, some of the practices in the fraternity itself.

It is going to have to pick up some new programs, and change the housing situation. The large multi-hundred thousand dollar fraternity house is a thing of the past. People want apartment-type living now.

If these things are changed, then I think the fraternities will certainly have something that will attract people.

Burner — I think some of the problems in the east are related to the commuter situation. They don't really have a campus environment, so there is nothing to hold the kids on campus and interest them in campus activities.

So long as we have a campus situation—people living here away from their home towns—they can realize the value of fraternities and sororities. I think this will reduce the kind of problems that the eastern universities have had.

Sooner — What were the statistics on rush this year?

Burner — The sororities were down a little from the year before. We have statistics for about 10 years. This year about 650 people were lined up to go through, but not all of them came for rush. About 575 actually came down. The total number that pledged turned out to be about 400, so you can see there were quite a few that didn't pledge.

Sooner — You mean that nearly 175 dropped out of rush and didn't pledge?

Burner — I think it was about that.

Sooner — What do you see as the cause of this?

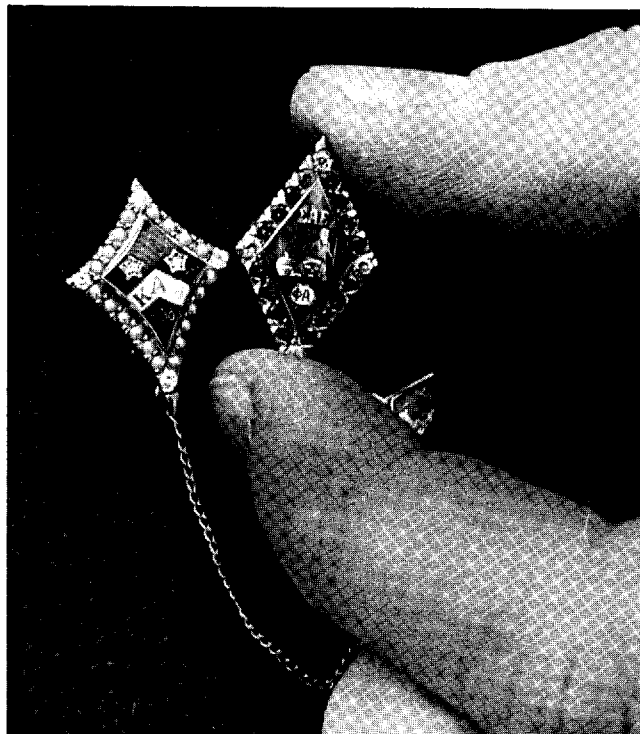
Burner — Well, some of that involved people who I don't think really knew what to expect. A lot of them came down to look because they really didn't know what the sororities were about.

We took a survey after rush. This was a big focusing point because we wanted to evaluate what was going on. A number of the girls expressed an interest in pledging but they just wanted to wait a little bit until after they had seen everything. Some of them objected to some of the formality of rush, having to dress up. These were some of the trivial things they objected to. I was hoping the survey would give one good clue as to the overall objection to rush.

We ended up with about 550 pledges because we added some in open rush.

Sooner — Do you have any plans to change the rush procedures such as adopting deferred rush or dropping some of the formalities?

Burner — We had a number from the survey that wanted to pledge later. It was pretty much divided as far as arranging rush week—I mean other commitments, the problem of running too close to the start of classes and things like that. More than likely we



will move it as close to school or the week of registration as we can get it so it won't be quite so early.

I can foresee rush deformatizing in respect to the dress. Also, it is becoming more important what is said in rush, not just who can put on the best skits. The skits have always had a purpose, but I think we must show the rushees what they are going to get out of pledging, how much it is really going to cost them, what they are really going to have to do as a pledge so all that won't be so much of a surprise when they get in.

Sooner — Ron, tell what deferred rush is and how it worked this year.

Redus — Deferred means that rush is conducted after the beginning of school, as I understand it. This can be anywhere from one week up until semester or even possibly a year after I guess. We have not had deferred rush here at OU yet. This past year we had open houses during the first week of school. We tried to cut down some of the formality of rush as far as the strict registration and the fees that the guys had to pay. There were no fees required of the rushees, and they could come and go at open houses at their leisure.

We found it was a little bit too unstructured. None of the fraternities knew who was coming or when they were coming. Right now we are working on some way to inform the houses who is coming to what house at what time.

I think eventually it will evolve into an entirely open system where people can pledge any time during the year and even throughout the summer. I think this is a few years away because I don't think we could handle the situation or that we want it right now.

Sooner — How many people went through this open house period?

Redus — We had about 550 to 575 people going through open house that we knew of—people who registered and the people who went back several times. There were about 800 people exposed to the Greek system during the open house period. This is about 200 more than have ever been exposed to it in the past five or six years. During the past five or six years the number of people going through rush has been decreasing steadily.

This year out of those 800 people we had about 475 or 500 pledge. There were a lot of people for one reason or another who decided to wait to pledge during open or not pledge at all. We did pick up about another 150 people who pledged later. This year we are having more formalized open rush. We are having two nights of open houses in which fraternities can invite guys over to the houses and the houses will be open for people who are interested in pledging to come over to meet the men. This also is for people who are not interested in pledging but who would like to meet some of the guys and see some of the houses.

Sooner — Do you see a trend beginning where fewer people will come through rush and fewer people will pledge with possibly more houses dying out?

Burner — Everybody looks at things so negatively, and I don't see that at all. People are taking it very seriously when they pledge because it is a four-year commitment. It goes even further than that if they take their life commitment seriously. So before they take a step like that, they really have to know what they are getting into.

So often, if a girl comes from a small school or comes from out of state or doesn't have a sister or a mother who is familiar with sororities, she really isn't so well informed. We have a hard time familiarizing that kind of girl with the system at the high school because high schools can't just let anyone come in and recruit. We have tried to keep high school counselors informed so they can tell the students as much as possible. But it is really an uphill battle.

As long as we do everything we can to interest the girls, as long as we let them know what is offered, I don't think we will have any trouble getting them interested. There are a lot of advantages to sorority life, and we have to let them know what they are. Probably the first real contact we have with the girls is the summer tour, unless they have come up earlier in the spring for a legacy weekend or something like that.

Sooner — Ron, you mentioned getting rid of some of the deadwood and altering the housing program we now have. How do you foresee getting rid of these large houses and restructuring the living conditions of fraternities?

Redus — I think this is one of the real problems we face right now because it is almost unfeasible financially to sell a house because of the money invested in them. There are some houses here worth well over a half a million dollars. It would be practically impossible to get the money out of them that we have put into them. But then again, they are becoming very much of a handicap as far as having to finance the things—having to pay the high rent, the utilities, the mortgage

and things like this. This is really putting us in a bind because we have to have money to pay our bills and in order to get the money we have to get men into the houses. When we do this there is always a danger of feeling like we have to pledge a certain number of men just so we can make our house operate.

There is always the possibility of lowering the quality of man perhaps a little bit that you are interested in pledging.

I think the trend, as I said, will be to apartment type living—if there is some way we can remodel the houses. I know we have talked about this with several national officers—remodeling the houses and making them into apartment-style living, sort of sealing off the rooms and making outside exits where each room is a unit in itself or perhaps joining two rooms and putting bathrooms between them. We need some sort of arrangement to give people more privacy than they have now.

Sooner — Will the rules of the fraternities and sororities become less rigid? Will men have the freedom to have women in their rooms, to not go to house functions, and will girls have no hours?

Redus — Of course, all these things are not up to us to decide. There are university policies on open house. We are classified as university housing, and we are still under the university's governance. Things like open house hours and closing hours for girls fall under that jurisdiction.

Now as far as required attendance at house functions and things like this, I think this is one of the things that is being cut out in a lot of houses because we are recognizing that a lot of people have different ideas about things and a lot of people perhaps don't want to go to the basketball games or don't want to go to a certain function.

Many times there is a feeling in the house of "why should we make someone go when he doesn't want to go." We should provide the opportunity to go, and if they don't desire to take advantage of this, then that is their prerogative.

We need to recognize the individual's rights and realize they are human beings and not just numbers on the list at the fraternity. They are human beings, and they have a right to their own privacy and their own ideas and to do what they want to do within the laws of society and without infringing on someone else's rights.



Burner — I think here is where you have a contrast with the sororities. You don't have so much emphasis on the privacy aspect because they want, to some extent, to get away from the isolation that you find in some of the dorms. They wanted to live together or they wouldn't have pledged. As for the business of hours, as long as they are upperclassmen, they can pretty much negotiate their own hours. Most of the houses are opening up pretty much.

Sooner — In your respective areas how many houses are hurting financially? Are there any facing the possibility of closing within the next year?

Burner — I don't anticipate any of the sororities closing. A lot of them have real good financial advisers; in fact they may have more supervision than they want. Of course, financial things are pretty private, and you don't hear about them until they get pretty hard up.

Redus — I think most of the houses could be in better financial shape. But then I think probably most people could be in better financial shape. I don't think there are any fraternity houses that will close within the next year due to financial problems. I do think that most of the houses could use financial guidance, and there are several that need it very, very badly, but I don't think that will close any of them within the next year.

Sooner — Do either of you foresee coed Greek houses?

Redus — I think that is quite a ways in the future. The Midwest has not been exposed to that type of situation and thinking yet. Sometime in the future it may be feasible, but in the near future I would say no.

Burner — Also when you join a sorority you aren't just joining an organization, you are becoming part of a heritage. I can't see the merger of groups especially when they are set so strongly on the national level.

Redus — The whole concept of a fraternity or sorority is that you are living with a group of men or women that you feel you have things in common with. You also recognize differences within the group. It is an educational process, rather like a microcosm in respect

to the world. In most groups you have a fairly large cross section of people with different ideas.

Sooner — Why are fraternities and sororities not integrated?

Burner — I think the system has to be opened up just like all of the other institutions in the country that haven't been opened up before. It takes a little bit of time, though, because most of the sororities operate on a national level and have conventions every two years. Anything of significance has to be negotiated at that time. There are some that have opened their membership, but they are not requiring every chapter to do so. It's supposed to be an individual thing. So you come to the Oklahoma campus and there aren't any blacks that have come through rush. There could be a number of reasons for this, but if they haven't come through, you can't pledge them. This is the whole problem. So you can't look at the system and say it's white and therefore it's closed, because I don't think that is the case. It is a matter of dual acceptance—the houses realizing they need to open up and the black girls realizing they can get something out of the sorority experience.

The two black sororities in Panhellenic are a metropolitan type thing. They have university women and they also have business women in the surrounding area. So you find a different kind of emphasis there. Although their membership is open, they are concentrating on the black problems everywhere rather than being just campus oriented.

Sooner — Are the black sororities operated under Panhellenic rules and regulations?

Burner — Yes. They are regular members, but because they don't have houses and many of their members are off campus a lot of our activities are not of great interest to them. Most of our rules aren't restrictive. We have to help them in rush activities. If they want help, we do everything we can. Do I make myself clear? You know, it just takes so much time. If I were a black girl coming to the OU campus I would think about looking at other sororities because it would be something new.

Sooner — Why haven't the Jewish girls integrated into the sorority system?

Burner — It all gets down to the fact that you will pledge where you feel most at home. Overall creeds don't make so much difference, but there is a certain comfort in being with people of the same background or maybe the same religion or belief. Choosing a sorority is an individual choice, and if a Jewish girl feels more at home in a gentile house, then every opportunity should be made for her to pledge there. It should be a mutual thing. People here have made those individual choices and you don't find groups really spreading out much.

Redus — Also I think a lot of times people tend to pledge where they know some of the membership in the house. Since most of the Jewish people here are from out of state—Chicago, St. Louis, the east coast—it is a rather self-perpetuating thing. Most of the people they know are in a few houses, and so they will tend to pledge those. Then when other girls come through,

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	1960-61	1970-71
Fraternities		
number of chapters	24	25
number of pledges	550	650
total membership	1,600	1,650
Sororities		
number of chapters	16	15
number of pledges	550	550
total membership	1,300	1,350
Total On-Campus Enrollment	10,301	18,052

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they will know girls who have just pledged, so it is very difficult to expand.

There are Jewish men in several of the fraternities, and there is nothing discriminatory in any of the national fraternities' constitutions. Like Cindy was saying, we are dealing with people, and it will take a while for people's attitudes to loosen before this becomes a widespread practice.

Sooner — Are the black fraternities integrated in the IFC?

Redus — The black fraternities come to the IFC meetings and seem to feel they are very much a part of the Greek system. We certainly have made every effort to work with them and help them in any way we can.

Sooner — How much pressure do the alumni put on a house as to who pledges?

Burner — In sororities they have influence through the recommendations. I think there are seven out of the thirteen sororities that no longer require recommendations, so in that way they are removing the main influence of the alumnae. We limit how many alums can be in the house during rush just to avoid that kind of pressure. I think most of the time the girls can pledge who they want to. There really are no problems.

Redus — In fraternities the pressure is probably not so great as it is in sororities. The alumni often recommend boys for the fraternity to consider, but very seldom is there any pressure, or very strong pressure, for a house to pledge a certain boy. Of course, you always have family ties, and there is some pressure there, but they usually are fairly well accepted anyway.

Burner — I think part of the alumni thing is how long a chapter has been on this campus. If there are a lot of alums around this area, they are going to be interested in their chapter. The newer groups have fewer alums and don't have as much pressure put on them.

Redus — Also I think the houses should and do go out of their way to be considerate of their alumni and certainly respect their recommendations and listen to them and give them every chance. I think the alumni are not sluffed off in this respect.

Burner — They really have helped. Like on the summer tours we have, they help find a place for us to come and stay.

Redus — They sponsor many rush parties and are very beneficial to the housing rush chairman. They also contribute to the rush fund.

Sooner — Are the fraternities still competing adequately with the prices of dormitories and apartments?

Redus — Yes. The fraternities and sororities cost about the same as it costs to live in the towers. And I think the living conditions in all instances are just as good and in some instances better than the conditions provided by the university.

Sooner — What about the prices of apartments?

Burner — When you start talking about places like

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Charles A. Elder
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Oklahoma City

Signature

Deadline May 1st

Signature

Four Seasons the prices are about \$180 a month or something like that, and, of course, if you have two bedrooms the cost goes up to about \$200. If you divide that between two people and add in the cost of the food, it would come out about the same. Of course, if you find a bargain duplex or something like that, a person can get along a little cheaper. You have to remember too that in a sorority or fraternity house you are paying someone to do the cooking. It can be to your advantage because it gives you more time since the meals are already at the tables for you.

Sooner — Will the fraternities or sororities open up the houses and let boarders come in or perhaps even people who eat and sleep there but are not members?

Redus — I can't see this at any time in the near future at all. I do think it is a possibility in the summer months when the men are gone for the summer, but it is not feasible right now during the regular school year.

Sooner — Are the sororities going to open up?

Burner — Well, I think we have a pretty good system now. We don't have any houses that are weak and getting ready to go off the cliff or anything. So I really don't foresee the need for that. You lose some of the identity of your house when you have people coming in without the mutual participation.

Sooner — How have the innovations in university housing units affected the Greek system?

Burner — A lot of it is duplication of what we already have in the Greek houses. I think, however, in the dorms you lose some of the continuity you find

in the Greek house and some of the tradition the house has. But I think it is obvious the housing units are trying to satisfy the needs of the people.

Sooner — What I gather from what you are saying then is that the Greeks at this university are not facing the same kind of problems as Greek organizations in other parts of the country. Is this right?

Redus — They will not within the near future. Like I said before, I think the Greek system here is in fairly good shape. You must take into consideration that people are changing and that the whole world is changing. If the Greek system does not change with it like it has changed here in the past three or four years—since I have been here—and if it does not continue to change, then it will be in trouble. Any institution in the world is in trouble if it stagnates while the rest of the world is changing.

I feel there is more than enough leadership and intelligence within the Greek system that, if given the opportunity, the system can make the changes that need to be made and continue to thrive and be just as important to college campuses as it is today.

Burner — Another thing that has occurred since everybody started on this individual kick all over the campus—there hasn't been as much criticism about being a Greek. I think that people are accepting the idea that there are people who want to be Greeks. We don't see too many editorials this year about dumb Greeks or anything like that just because people are accepting the fact that some people want to be Greeks.

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