Fraternity & Sorority Blueprint: Communication Committee

Committee Members
RC Pate (Iota Chi Rho, alumnus)
Mary Japhet (Spurs, alumna)
Elisabeth Purdy (Sigma Theta Tau)
Adwaith Mani (KKD)
Conner McKinney (Chi Delta Tau)
Jamie Thompson (staff)
Briana McGlamory (staff)
Mary Kay Cooper (staff)
Sharon Jones Schweitzer (chair, staff)

Executive Summary

The Blueprint Implementation Committee on Communication met twice during the 2013-14 academic year and intermittently over e-mail and the telephone to discuss ways to improve the culture of fraternity/sorority communication at Trinity University. Significant recommendations include: 1) developing ongoing, proactive communication about the positive impact that fraternity and sorority life has on the Trinity campus, 2) developing specific protocols for communicating with related constituency groups in the event of a critical incident; and 3) action related to modes of current communication used by alumni when seeking information about Trinity fraternity/sorority life.

Communication Recommendations

Trinity’s fraternities and sororities make many positive contributions to the University community and the San Antonio area. These organizations provide opportunities for leadership development, alumni networking, and service to the Trinity & San Antonio community. Many of the following recommendations have already been embraced as a means to provide balance to University communications related to fraternities and sororities.

1. Campus and Community Involvement (CCI) should serve as the “eyes and ears” of these contributions and share accomplishments and achievements with
University Communications for potential public relations and marketing initiatives.

2. CCI and University communicators should utilize Trinity’s various social media outlets to promote the “positive contributions” organizations make. i.e. Trinity Greek Life Facebook, Trinity Greek Life Twitter (@TU_GreekLife), and “It’s all Greek to Me” Blog (http://trinitygreeks.blogspot.com/).

3. All alumni constituencies and students should be considered as the target audience for these messages.

Critical incidents that occur related to activities associated with fraternities and sororities present themselves as unique instances in which special methods of communication should be utilized. In the event that an organization(s) is suspended or dechartered, the following protocols are recommended:

4. The director of Campus and Community Involvement, the coordinator of Fraternity and Sorority Life, the senior director of Alumni Relations, the assistant vice president for External Relations, and the organization(s) alumni advisor(s) will meet within 24 hours of notification of incident to determine how best to respond to the following questions related to the situation:

   a. What constituencies need to be informed about situation?
   b. Alumni v. Greek Alumni subset of the larger group?
   c. Internal v. external?
   d. How will appropriate levels of messaging be developed as an incident becomes public?
   e. What is the message at this time?
   f. Determine at what stages will information/communication be released?
   g. What is the best method to communicate with the constituents of interest?
   h. What role should alumni advisors play in the communication plan related to the critical situation?
   i. If wider communication is deemed appropriate, University Communications should develop messaging (in consultation with the above group) and distribute to internal and external audiences.
   j. If it is determined that additional professional communications expertise is needed, the team may draw from the ranks of fraternity/sorority alumni who work in the communications field.
The following principles will be considered as messaging and communication are developed:

a. Keep messages devoid of speculation.

b. Consider whether announcements can be withheld from wider communication until after an appeal if one is sought.

c. When possible, high level University messages should continue to validate the important role fraternities and sororities play in University life.

d. Once messages and audiences are determined, all methods of communication (e-mail, distribution lists, social media outlets, and website) will be evaluated on an ongoing basis for their function, purpose, and role in managing messages appropriately.

e. Acknowledge the competing interests of Greek alumni and the University’s risk exposure and reputational impact in announcing actions taken against Trinity fraternities and sororities.

Procedural Recommendations:

1. The Blueprint Implementation Committee on Communication recommended that the “Greek Talk” listserv be eliminated because it is not an effective means of communication with Greek alumni. The Committee also recommended that no action be taken related to the closed Trinity Greek “Facebook” page, except to monitor and interject corrections to statements as needed and appropriate.

2. In the event of any disciplinary action for a sorority or fraternity, it is recommended that the alumni advisor for the organization be informed along with the student leaders before disciplinary action is taken.

3. It is recommended that members of the National Alumni Board’s fraternity and sorority committee be included in initial communication when an organization is to be suspended or asked to relinquish its charter.

August 2014