# VIRGINIA TECH
# FRATERNITY AND SORORITY LIFE
## *Task Force Report*

VIRGINIA TECH

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# COMISSION ROSTER

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# LETTER TO THE PROVOST

Dear Provost Clarke:

On behalf of the Virginia Tech Commission on Fraternity and Sorority Life Culture at Virginia Tech, I am pleased to share the results of our work.

Since receiving your charge a year ago, the twenty individuals you appointed have studied fraternity and sorority life, both nationally and at Virginia Tech. This has been an enormously satisfying journey; the diversity of perspectives and experiences of those on the Commission was a significant asset. It is a rare opportunity for faculty, staff, alumni, students, and Town of Blacksburg officials to gather and think critically about a student experience that has played such a prominent role in the life of our campus.

While fraternity and sorority life is often considered an integral part of the social, academic, and leadership experiences available to undergraduates, more and more institutions are examining ways to uncover the underlying issues that cause many to question the viability of the fraternity and sorority experience in years ahead. As names like Tim Piazza (Penn State), Maxwell Gruver (LSU), Andrew Coffey (Florida State), Tucker Hipps (Clemson), and too many others cycle through the media, all students recently lost to fraternity related incidents, universities continue to look conscientiously at how to improve the culture without sacrificing a facet of the undergraduate experience that is important to students and alumni alike.

As part of our study, the Commission read research and books, visited fraternity and sorority houses, talked with national and local experts, and shared our experiences and perspectives. We also requested and received presentations from key Virginia Tech stakeholders and made a conscientious effort to listen carefully to the diverse perspectives represented in the room. In the end, I am pleased to report that the Commission found that there is much for which to be proud about the fraternity and sorority program at Virginia Tech. While there is a lot to improve, our students are flourishing.

In the end, we believe we have offered reasonable, measurable, and manageable recommendations with the potential to guide Virginia Tech toward a fraternity and sorority experience that is a national exemplar. With this, we remain hopeful about the future.

Sincerely,

Frank Shushok, Jr., Ph.D.
Senior Associate Vice President for Student Affairs
Chair, Virginia Tech Commission on Fraternity and Sorority Life Culture

# BACKGROUND CONTEXUALIZATION

At Virginia Tech, we believe collective commitment to continuous improvement is essential for advancing the learning experiences of students. In that spirit, Executive Vice President and Provost Cyril R. Clarke appointed the Commission on Fraternity and Sorority Life Culture in August 2018 (Appendix A) and asked Senior Associate Vice President for Student Affairs Frank Shushok to lead this effort.

The Commission comprised twenty individuals, and included faculty, staff, students, and Town of Blacksburg officials. The diversity of this Commission was an important asset to the group's work and consisted of individuals with a broad range of experience with, and exposure to, the fraternity and sorority experience. At Provost Clarke's request, several questions guided the Commission's work:

1.  What is the Commission's assessment of the culture of fraternity and sorority life at Virginia Tech with regard to: alignment with the Virginia Tech Principles of Community; student wellbeing and safety; academic success; alignment with developmental goals of living-learning communities at Virginia Tech; and Virginia Tech's Aspirations for Student Learning?

2.  What data are available to assess the culture of fraternity and sorority life and, if the information currently available is insufficient, what additional information needs to be collected?

3.  Moving forward, are there any strategies or actions that could enhance the culture of fraternity and sorority life, as well as position Virginia Tech as a national leader?

Over the course of an academic year, the Commission met together for over twenty hours, and included numerous educational interviews with national leaders about larger landscape issues facing fraternities and sororities across the country. Among those interviewed included: Dr. Michael Bowie, Collegiate Chair of the National Pan-Hellenic Association; Ms. Phyllis Grissom, President-Elect of the Fraternity and Sorority Political Action Committee; Mr. Francisco Lugo, President of the National Association of Latino Fraternal Organizations (NALFO); Mr. Brian C. Warren, Jr., Chief Executive Officer of Sigma Phi Epsilon International Fraternity; and Dr. Edward Spencer, Vice President Emeritus for Student Affairs (Virginia Tech). When visiting with these experts, we asked many questions, including:

•  From your perspective, what are the larger "landscape issues" you are seeing with groups you support?

•  What is it you think campuses are doing well or not doing well to strengthen the potential of fraternities and sororities?

•  What do you think is essential for us to address as part of our recommendations for strengthening the culture of fraternities and sororities at Virginia Tech?

Commission members also read a robust selection of contemporary fraternity and sorority research studies, media reports from the last five years, and books and opinion pieces that included a variety of perspectives. As part of the Commission's work, it reviewed Virginia Tech specific data such as conduct records, demographic trends, academic and retention reports, and records from the Town of Blacksburg regarding off-campus fraternity housing. Finally, the Commission took tours of several on and off-campus fraternity and sorority houses, and participated in small group discussions to explore strategies for improving Virginia Tech's fraternity and sorority experience.

# HIGH LEVEL FINDINGS

Seven high-level findings particularly influenced the assumptions and recommendations offered later in this report:

1. **Fraternity and sorority life continues to flourish at Virginia Tech, with a growing number of students participating and succeeding in the classroom.**

Virginia Tech has established a national reputation for maintaining a progressive, proactive, and healthy fraternity and sorority life program. After graduating, many Virginia Tech students are selected by their national organizations to serve terms as traveling consultants–a testament to the quality of our students and their experiences in their organizations. Students in fraternities and sororities participate in almost every facet of campus life from student government, to residential life, to academic societies, to orientation. While many campuses have seen decreases in the number of students participating in fraternity and sorority life, Virginia Tech has experienced a steady growth trajectory from 3,372 students in 2009, to 4,387 in 2014, to 5,005 students in 2018. During this same time period, the academic performance of fraternity and sorority students has strengthened. These students consistently outperform the general student population's grade point averages and model first to second year retention rates at a five-year average of 98 percent (5-7 percent higher than the general student population). Overall, we found that students participating in fraternity and sorority life at Virginia Tech are engaged, academically successful, and flourishing.

2. **While most fraternities and sororities at Virginia Tech maintain a positive and safe culture, Virginia Tech has not been immune to incidents of hazing and dangerous alcohol-related behavior.**

Virginia Tech takes a strong stance on hazing and works diligently to educate the fraternity and sorority community about hazing prevention. Despite these efforts, however, Student Conduct has found nine organizations responsible for hazing over the last five years. Of those organizations, seven have been suspended from the university. Some organizations' traditions and/or alumni networks continue to support a mindset that fosters hazing, and cultural change is challenging. Indeed, in many cases, members have expressed that the hazing activities were part of "bonding" rituals or "rites of passage." Many members perpetuate hazing behaviors that they experienced as new members, creating a cycle that is difficult to break.

Similarly, as social organizations, some fraternities and sororities at Virginia Tech contribute to and perpetuate a culture that centers on drinking. In 2017-2018, Student Conduct found 20 organizations responsible for violating the university's Alcoholic Beverage policy, primarily by providing alcohol to underage students at parties. These violations frequently came to light because students became sick from drinking and, in some cases, required transport to the hospital. Multiple cases involved students who had dangerously high blood alcohol levels–some as high as three or more times the legal limit. Members of fraternities and sororities are also referred to Student Conduct for alcohol violations at higher rates that non-members. In spring semester 2019, for example, fraternity and sorority members accounted for 23 percent of total alcohol violations, despite being only 16 percent of the overall student population.

3.  **'Suspended fraternities that continue to operate without university recognition are a serious threat to the reputation of Virginia Tech.**

Virginia Tech has been robust in its efforts to hold fraternities and sororities accountable for breaches in standards, especially when student safety is compromised. Historically, the standard practice has been for national organizations to follow the university's lead and similarly revoke recognition. From Virginia Tech's perspective, revoking recognition is a last resort and is tantamount to declaring an organization's culture unsafe. In recent years, however, a growing trend has been for some national organizations to allow suspended organizations to operate outside of university recognition. Currently, there are eight such groups. Through interviews with national leaders, the Commission has learned that potential lost revenue in the form of national fraternity dues may be influencing this unfortunate trend. Jeopardized financial models (exacerbated by skyrocketing insurance premiums), have tempted some national fraternities to forego partnership with the University. In other instances, when both Virginia Tech and the national organization revoke recognition, students with the assistance of alumni create an alias and continue operations.

The challenges posed by this growing reality are manifold. First, many students are unable to distinguish between "recognized and unrecognized" fraternities. As a result, students may be unaware that Virginia Tech has deemed these cultures unsafe. Second, since these unrecognized groups typically operate in the town, they have fostered frustration with Town officials, neighbors, and law enforcement. The Commission received a summary of off-campus fraternity house code violations from 2016-2019. In the case of two suspended fraternities, the number of code enforcement violations each reached 15. Third, the overall fraternity and sorority community at Virginia Tech experiences reputation erosion when the general public cannot distinguish between recognized and unrecognized fraternities, the latter often operating outside the bounds of generally agreed upon standards.

Suspended organizations (or their reconstituted aliases) include: Alpha Epsilon Pi, Center Club (formerly Sigma Chi), Delta Kappa Epsilon, Kappa Sigma, Lambda Chi Alpha, Omicron Alpha Kappa (formerly Kappa Delta Rho), Theta Delta Chi, Sigma Alpha Epsilon.

4.  **Fraternity and sorority life at Virginia Tech remains largely demographically homogenous, and has a unique opportunity to model inclusion.**

As Virginia Tech aspires to diversify the overall student population, the fraternity and sorority community finds itself lagging behind. In fall 2018, White students comprised just above 65 percent of the entire undergraduate student population. In contrast, White students represent 78 percent of the fraternity and sorority community. In the case of on-campus fraternity and sorority housing in Oak Lane, the percentage of White students is 83 percent. The historical tracking of socioeconomic, racial, ethnic, and religious demographics data has not been collected–and is considered an important step moving forward.

5.  **Housing is an important facilitator of fraternity and sorority culture at Virginia Tech, and efforts to enhance Oak Lane to better enable desired outcomes is necessary.**

Virginia Tech's Oak Lane community was constructed in four phases and consists of 19 fraternity and sorority houses. The first three houses opened in 1983, seven opened in 1990, eight opened in 2001, and one house opened in 2013. The Facility Inventory Condition and Assessment System (FICAS) is a database of all Virginia Tech facilities. Each buildings receives a facility condition index (FCI) score. An FCI under 10 percent is generally rated as good, 11-20 percent as fair, and 21 percent and above as poor. In comparison to our other residential facilities, the majority of Oak Lane houses are above the 20 percent fair threshold. The first two phases of Oak Lane houses have poor FCI scores ranging from 21 percent to 30 percent. The third phase houses have fair FCI scores ranging from 18 percent to 15 percent. Only the fourth phase house has a good rating of 0 percent. In addition to the needed facility improvements, the fraternity and sorority community has expanded well beyond Oak Lane. Oak Lane lacks sufficient community space for gatherings and events.

Since Oak Lane opened in 1983, the programmatic and community needs have shifted. To respond to these shifts, the staffing model for Oak Lane must be re-imagined. A review of the 2018-2019 on-call reports for campus showed 18 reports from Oak Lane. For comparison, Payne, Peddrew-Yates and New Residence Hall East all house primarily upper-division students and are comparable in size to the Oak Lane community. The staff in these buildings documented 64 reports. Undergraduate house supervisors may historically underreport issues that are documented regularly in other on-campus facilities. Moving to an increased professional presence can help further promote student engagement, well-being, and academic success.

6. **The infrastructure necessary to advance the highest level of educational programming for fraternities and sororities at Virginia Tech is under resourced and under developed.**

In spite of the significant growth in the fraternity and sorority population over the last ten years, the professional support staff structure has remained stable. In addition, the Fraternity and Sorority Life office has increased responsibility for advising and coordinating labor-intensive educational initiatives such as the Fraternal Leaders Institute. This combination of population growth and increased workload has depleted staff capacity to launch new educational initiatives, especially germane to pressing issues such as hazing, leadership, and inclusion. Moreover, early intervention for chapters struggling with cultural and disciplinary challenges requires significant investment. Increasing staff capacity could abate the growing number of organizations suspended, as over 75 percent of suspended organizations were on a status sanction at the time of separation from the University.

7. **Fraternity and Sorority life at Virginia Tech needs a more robust collection of student experience data to better inform the strategy for strengthening the culture.**

Virginia Tech consistently tracks academic, retention, conduct, and some demographic data (overall participation numbers and gender) of students participating in fraternity and sorority life. An overall strategy for studying the fraternity and sorority student experience, however, has not been implemented–and is important for better understanding and improving the culture.

# ASSUMPTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

## ASSUMPTION 1

**Prospective students and their families deserve a clear, coherent, and honest assessment of the culture of fraternities and sororities they consider joining.**

The Commission recognizes that there is not a singular fraternity and sorority life "culture," and that experiences vary substantially across the country and by institutional type. Even within the context of Virginia Tech, there is a continuum of experiences–many are exceptional and wholly consistent with the aims and aspirations of the University. Other organizations are less committed to aspirational values, practices, and policies that correlate with healthy and flourishing cultures–and prospective students deserve an honest and forthright assessment of healthy and unhealthy chapters before joining. Many Virginia Tech students (and their families) are attracted to the articulated aims that fraternities and sororities promote, yet they are often ill-equipped with information to effectively discern between those living up to the highest standards and those that are not. The Commission also believes it is important to promote vigorously fraternities and sororities striving for excellence.

It is within this spirit that the Commission recommends the following:

1. By Fall 2019, Virginia Tech should develop a comprehensive response and communication plan informing all students and their families about unrecognized fraternities and sororities, and their aliases, operating outside the bounds of university recognition. This should include a letter to all incoming students and families, dissemination through social media, family newsletters, and a twice-annual advertisement in the Collegiate Times.

2. By Fall 2019, Virginia Tech should re-design its current fraternity and sorority scorecard so that it is easy to interpret and utilize in the decision-making process. Specific elements of the scorecard should include: the opt-in certification status (beginning in 2020), the chapter grade point average, all organizational violations of the Code of Student Conduct in the last three years, the number of individual students in the chapter who have violated the Code of Student Conduct within the last three years, the demographic make-up of the chapter, a detailed cost of participation, and an objectively scored evaluation of the chapter's involvement in leadership development programs, trainings, and community-based outreach and service. Chapters with official housing should receive an objectively defined "good neighbor grade" from either Virginia Tech or the Town of Blacksburg, depending on location.

3. By Fall 2020, Virginia Tech should provide a comprehensive and rigorous "opt-in" certification program for all fraternities and sororities. Participating chapters, through certification, would offer transparent insight into the health of a fraternity or sorority, as well as documented participation in, and commitment to, particular educational offerings and trainings, locally, regionally, and nationally. Certified chapters, for example, would engage in annual educational trainings in topics such as bystander intervention, inclusion, leadership, financial management, and risk management. Participating chapters should be rewarded and celebrated publicly.

4. Every three years, Virginia Tech should enact a comprehensive study of fraternity and sorority culture. This research endeavor should include a climate study that encompasses campus-wide perception of fraternity and sorority life. Quantitative and qualitative data collection is strongly encouraged to measure student learning from participation in the fraternity and sorority life experience.

## ASSUMPTION 2
**Obstacles to student wellbeing continue to erode the potential impact of fraternities and sororities at Virginia Tech (hazing, alcohol abuse, etc.).**

The foundation for a fraternity or sorority experience is built upon the aspiration that, upon joining, a member becomes a better person through a lifetime of opportunities for personal growth, attainment, and overall thriving. In recent years, incidents related to hazing, alcohol abuse, sexual misconduct, mental health, and more have increased in complexity and intensity across the national and international fraternity and sorority culture. While the Virginia Tech fraternity and sorority life experience has not reached the same extremes as other communities that have been documented in national media, noteworthy challenges and obstacles remain. Virginia Tech must embrace well-being practices that equip students across each of our chapters and governing councils.

Further, the Commission believes that unrecognized groups, particularly those with off-campus houses, pose a significant threat to the culture of fraternities and sororities at Virginia Tech, as well as to student safety, well-being, and town-gown relationships. In many cases, previous members of groups that have lost recognition continue to plan and participate in activities as if still part of a recognized fraternity, leading the majority of the student population to consider these groups active and functioning. The Commission realizes that in order to advance a healthy community, it must consider developing a strategy that effectively balances the roles of the chapter, national organization, and our campus (both the administrative staff and governing councils).

It is within this spirit that the Commission recommends the following:

1. **By Spring 2020, Virginia Tech should embark on a study, administered by a national leader on hazing, analyzing the experience of new members during their joining process to adequately assess the challenges of two-tiered membership in fraternities and sororities. This study will demonstrate the degree to which fraternity and sorority life develops programmatic opportunities for new members (defined as those that are in a traditional "pledging" or "intake" process, or newly initiated members) that equip them to expect a healthy and safe experience, and to navigate away from chapters that would be detrimental to them.**

2. **By Fall 2020, Virginia Tech should create a new relationship statement that reflects the partnership it seeks with chapters, alumni and alumnae volunteers, and national and international headquarters. Within this statement, Virginia Tech will be able to articulate its hopes and expectations for a healthy and safe fraternity and sorority experience. Specifically, it should focus effort upon the roles that each entity should play in formulating practices, processes, policies, and interventions that address conduct associated with new member education, social events, and wellness education (alcohol and other drugs, mental health, harm reduction, etc.). Governing councils (IFC, NPHC, PHC, and UCFS) should facilitate a process for the development of an inter-council relationship statement of what they jointly expect and hope for in the experiences of chapters aligned within their umbrella organizations. The relationship statement should be mission-centric and have the proper balance of aspiration and compliance.**

3. **By Spring 2021, Virginia Tech should create an educational "train the trainer" intervention geared towards chapter officers with responsibility for new member education. This intervention would help new member educators courageously develop hazing-free experiences and inspire their chapters to accept, embrace, and positively support this shift.**

4. **Annually, Virginia Tech sororities and fraternities should receive risk-management programming from Hokie Wellness, specifically regarding the dangers of un-prescribed medications, recreational drugs, and alcohol consumption. Virginia Tech and the Office of Fraternity and Sorority Life must continue to dedicate efforts toward curbing the activities and events that occur within and amongst fraternities and sororities that foster an environment for excessive drinking and drug use. Periodically, a comprehensive assessment should be implemented to determine the drinking culture of a chapter (along with its environment), that would include quantitative and qualitative data regarding the prevalence of alcohol and drug-related issues.**

**The housing and gathering spaces of fraternities and sororities, both on and off-campus, are critical factors for student success, well-being, and town-gown relationships.**

The Commission recognizes that housing and gathering spaces are crucial facets of the fraternity and sorority life experience, and contribute ultimately to the success or failure of the programs on campuses nationwide. Several organizations have proposed and enacted substance-free housing, and while those policies have recorded positive impacts on student well-being, a variety of obstacles and the nuanced historical contextualization of organizations make this change difficult to implement.

Virginia Tech currently operates 19 fraternity and sorority houses in Oak Lane. Due to the small number of groups housed in Oak Lane compared to the overall fraternity and sorority life body, many organizations do not have any connection with the Oak Lane community. For many Oak Lane groups, the gatehouse (a small gathering room) and the chapter houses are too small to hold chapter meetings or events. The size of the houses is particularly problematic during Panhellenic recruitment, because the number of students presses the maximum occupancy of those spaces. The continued growth of Panhellenic chapters will require a new approach to recruitment in the near future.

Oak Lane houses have not had significant facility updates, and as such, the quality of the facilities varies widely. Some groups have made improvements to the house, while others have not. There are fluctuating demands for housing in Oak Lane; some chapters can fill their house, whereas others cannot. Complicating the state of the facilities is the Oak Lane staffing model. Compared to other residence halls, Oak Lane house supervisors rarely document conduct matters and other facility-related incidents. This practice negatively influences broader student success and well-being initiatives. By investing in professional staff members who are outside the organizations, they are able to address concerns without fear of their status in the organization. More importantly, they can serve in valuable mentoring roles for chapter members.

Currently, no NPHC and UCFS organizations at Virginia Tech have houses on or off-campus. NPHC and UCFS in particular view Oak Lane as inconvenient and not useful for their organizations. Squires is generally the preferred place for meeting and gathering, particularly because Squires houses the university's cultural and community centers. Similarly, IFC groups without a house in Oak Lane would not consider Oak Lane as relevant to their chapter operations, even though connections to other groups are desirable.

Every organization, including those in Oak Lane, struggles to find meeting and social space that meets their needs. Outdoor space is limited- recreational spaces are often unavailable to rent for organizational events. The university has limited indoor social gathering spaces on campus. For those groups that are off-campus in the Town of Blacksburg, their reliance on their houses for social events creates risk management concerns and town-gown problems.

It is within this spirit that the Commission recommends the following:

1. **By Spring 2021, Virginia Tech should complete a comprehensive study of the Oak Lane facilities. This study should consider how the Oak Lane facilities could support new and innovative staffing structures, propose facility improvements for the university and the organizations that include timelines and potential pricing, as well as consider opportunities to better utilize indoor and outdoor community spaces that could serve the broader fraternity and sorority community.**

2. **By Fall 2021, Virginia Tech should enact a professional staffing structure for the Oak Lane houses based on best practices that maximize the academic success, health, and wellness of the students residing in on-campus fraternity and sorority houses.**

3. As part of an opt-in certification program, Virginia Tech should formalize a process for an annual review on the conditions of on and off-campus fraternity and sorority houses and provide an objective "good neighbor grade" that includes feedback from the Town of Blacksburg. The annual review will also include regular "walk-throughs" of the facility with town and university partners to provide support and guidance on facility matters.

4. Under guidance and administration of the Office of Fraternity and Sorority Life, Virginia Tech should require an off-campus event planning document, sufficiently in advance of any event or activity, as a way to increase the visibility of, support for, and accountability of those activities and events.

5. Virginia Tech should compile and administer a study on how its fraternities and sororities that maintain chapter facilities would benefit from substance-free housing. Of particular concern should be whether a substance-free facility would shift increased, unsanctioned, and poorly managed alcohol consumption to satellite homes.

## ASSUMPTION 4

**As a land grant institution committed to growing its enrollment to include 40 percent underrepresented and underserved students by 2022, a carefully designed, managed, and executed structure that supports Virginia Tech's commitment to inclusion is fundamentally important to the success of fraternities and sororities.**

One of the greatest assets for learning emerges when students interact with, and learn from, peers from a rich diversity of backgrounds. On many campuses, fraternities and sororities have been criticized for being homogenous in makeup racially, ethnically, and socioeconomically. High profile incidents of racism, bias, macroaggressions and misogyny have exacerbated perceptions that diversity is an unwelcome priority in fraternities and sororities. As one university president puts it, "Unfortunately, despite societal changes, many Greek communities throughout higher education still resemble segregated neighborhoods, representing less racial and ethnic diversity than their campuses as a whole."

Acknowledging that higher education in the United States generally, and at Virginia Tech in particular, will continue to grow more diverse–and that this diversity represents a profound opportunity for student learning–Virginia Tech aspires to offer a national model of an inclusive fraternity and sorority community. To do so, Virginia Tech will need to take a multifaceted approach to strengthen diversity and inclusion within and among fraternities and sororities.


It is within this spirit that the Commission recommends the following:

1. By Fall 2021, Virginia Tech should design an overall wide-ranging communication strategy with the goal of attracting broader pools of students who have clear expectations of the values of fraternities and sororities, especially related to inclusion and sense of belonging.

2. By 2022, Virginia Tech should develop a comprehensive plan for growing and supporting the overall diversity of students participating in fraternity and sorority life, with the goal of meeting or exceeding the overall campus diversity. This should also include Virginia Tech reviewing chapter expansion and reinstatement policies, and revising them as necessary, to create greater access and support for groups focusing on underrepresented and historically marginalized populations.

3. By 2022, Virginia Tech should reinstate the Fraternity & Sorority Life Advisory Council (FSLAC) that meets monthly to guide the above mentioned comprehensive plan, as well as hire a professional staff member whose primary responsibility is to guide efforts to this end.

4. By 2022, Virginia Tech should create and incorporate specific educational and leadership development programs that cater to students in underrepresented groups and strengthen majority students' intercultural competence.

5. By 2023, Virginia Tech should provide an on-campus housing option in Oak Lane for culturally-based fraternities and sororities.

## ASSUMPTION 5

**The type and frequency of educational experiences, trainings, and interventions have a profound influence on the culture of fraternities and sororities and, therefore, the worldview students adopt.**

In How College Affects Students, Ernest Pascarella and Patrick Terenzini carefully synthesize decades of research that encourages institutions to combine the expertise of student affairs educators (in adult development, learning styles, cognition, and human communication) with the subject matter specialties of the faculty to bolster the overall impact of the college experience on students and their development. Additionally, with fraternities and sororities offering lifelong membership, much can be learned from the multi-generational lens of invested lifetime members who serve in advisory capacities. As such, the Commission recognizes that the involvement and support of chapter and alumni advisors vare key components of the interfraternal experience.

When implemented effectively, co-curricular experiences like participation in a fraternity and sorority can have a profound impact on student outcomes. Since the Virginia Tech student experience is guided by a set of clearly articulated values in guiding documents such as the Principles of Community, the Aspirations for Student Learning, and Beyond Boundaries, it is important that these aims are carefully integrated into the co-curricular experiences of students engaged in fraternity and sorority life.

As the fraternity and sorority membership has increased beyond 5,000 students, and comprises a growing diversity of organizational types, specifically an expanding cadre of culturally-based groups, the staffing of fraternities, and therefore the educational programs they implement, have been under resourced. The Office of Fraternity & Sorority Life currently comprises a full-time professional director, two assistant directors, a coordinator, two graduate assistants, and an office manager—all funded through student fees. This brings to bear two realities: 1) fraternities and sororities at Virginia Tech are under sourced to a level necessary to effectively implement the most robust educational strategy; and 2) the support provided to students participating in fraternities and sororities at are disproportionately resourced by the entire student population.

It is within this spirit that the Commission recommends the following:

1. **By Summer 2020, Virginia Tech should work closely with Student Affairs Advancement leaders to develop a philanthropic strategy to increase alumni support for fraternity and sorority educational experiences. Scholarships to increase socioeconomic access should also be a high priority for fundraising initiatives.**

2. **By Fall 2020, Virginia Tech should develop a comprehensive plan of the educational pathways that will guide students from initial membership through graduation. Programs, classes, trainings, retreats, and institutes should be carefully designed to build a coherent co-curriculum that encompasses the "fraternity and sorority experience" at Virginia Tech that complements opportunities offered by the national and international organizations and focuses upon aspects such as leadership development, diversity and inclusion, academic success, etc.**

3. **By Fall 2020, Virginia Tech should develop a strategy to ensure every fraternity and sorority has a committed and involved faculty advisor as well as an alumni or chapter advisor—with particular responsibility to ensure that academic success and lifelong learning and safety are of paramount priority.**

4. **By Fall 2020, Virginia Tech should have a minimum of one full-time professional staff member for every 750 students involved in fraternity and sorority life at Virginia Tech. Moreover, a healthy programming budget should be developed to assist with educational training, including participation in institutes. To not unduly tax the entire student population, additional resources beyond the current level of support should be a shared by those participating in fraternities and sororities through the implementation of a one-time and annual participation fee.**

# SUMMARIZED TIMELINE

### BY FALL, 2019:

- Virginia Tech should develop a comprehensive response and communication plan informing all students and their families about unrecognized fraternities and sororities, and their aliases, operating outside the bounds of university recognition. This should include a letter to all incoming students and families, dissemination through social media, family newsletters, and a twice-annual advertisement in the Collegiate Times.
- Virginia Tech should re-design its current fraternity & sorority scorecard so that it is easy to interpret and utilize in the decision-making process. Specific elements of the scorecard should include: the opt-in certification status (beginning in 2020), the chapter grade point average, all organizational violations of the Code of Student Conduct in the last three years, the number of individual students in the chapter who have violated the Code of Student Conduct within the last three years, the demographic make-up of the chapter, a detailed cost of participation, and an objectively scored evaluation of the chapter's involvement in leadership development programs, trainings, and community-based outreach and service. Chapters with official housing should receive an objectively defined "good neighbor grade" from either Virginia Tech or the Town of Blacksburg, depending on location.

### BY SPRING, 2020:

- Virginia Tech should embark on a study, administered by a national leader on hazing, analyzing the experience of new members during their joining process to adequately assess the challenges of two-tiered membership in fraternities and sororities. This study will demonstrate the degree to which fraternity and sorority life develops programmatic opportunities for new members (defined as those that are in a traditional "pledging" or "intake" process, or newly initiated members) that equip them to expect a healthy and safe experience, and to navigate away from chapters that would be detrimental to them.

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### BY FALL, 2020:

- Virginia Tech should provide a comprehensive and rigorous "opt-in" certification program for all fraternities and sororities. Participating chapters, through certification, would offer transparent insight into the health of a fraternity or sorority, as well as documented participation in, and commitment to, particular educational offerings and trainings, locally, regionally, and nationally. Certified chapters, for example, would engage in annual educational trainings in topics such as bystander intervention, inclusion, leadership, financial management, and risk management. Participating chapters should be rewarded and celebrated publicly.
- As part of an opt-in certification program, Virginia Tech should formalize a process for an annual review on the conditions of on and off-campus fraternity and sorority houses and provide an objective "good neighbor grade" that includes feedback from the Town of Blacksburg. The annual review will also include regular "walk-throughs" of the facility with town and university partners to provide support and guidance on facility matters.

- Virginia Tech should create a new relationship statement that reflects the partnership it seeks with chapters, alumni and alumnae volunteers, and national and international headquarters. Within this statement, Virginia Tech will be able to articulate its hopes and expectations for a healthy and safe fraternity and sorority experience. Specifically, it should focus effort upon the roles that each entity should play in formulating practices, processes, policies, and interventions that address conduct associated with new member education, social events, and wellness education (alcohol and other drugs, mental health, harm reduction, etc.). Governing councils (IFC, NPHC, PHC, and UCFS) should facilitate a process for the development of an inter-council relationship statement of what they jointly expect and hope for in the experiences of chapters aligned within their umbrella organizations. The relationship statement should be mission-centric and have the proper balance of aspiration and compliance.
- Virginia Tech should develop a comprehensive plan of the educational pathways that will guide students from initial membership through graduation. Programs, classes, trainings, retreats, and institutes should be carefully designed to build a coherent co-curriculum that encompasses the "fraternity and sorority experience" at Virginia Tech that complements opportunities offered by the national and international organizations and focuses upon aspects such as leadership development, diversity and inclusion, academic success, etc.
- Virginia Tech should develop a strategy to ensure every fraternity and sorority has a committed and involved faculty advisor as well as an alumni or chapter advisor–with particular responsibility to ensure that academic success and lifelong learning and safety are of paramount priority.
- Virginia Tech should have a minimum of one full-time professional staff member for every 750 students involved in fraternity and sorority life at Virginia Tech. Moreover, a healthy programming budget should be developed to assist with educational training, including participation in institutes. To not unduly tax the entire student population, additional resources beyond the current level of support should be a shared by those participating in fraternities and sororities through the implementation of a one-time and annual participation fee.

## BY SPRING, 2021:

- Virginia Tech should create an educational "train the trainer" intervention geared towards chapter officers with responsibility for new member education. This intervention would help new member educators courageously develop hazing-free experiences and inspire their chapters to accept, embrace, and positively support this shift.
- Virginia Tech should complete a comprehensive study of the Oak Lane facilities. This study should consider how the Oak Lane facilities could support new and innovative staffing structures, propose facility improvements for the university and the organizations that include timelines and potential pricing, as well as consider opportunities to better utilize indoor and outdoor community spaces that could serve the broader fraternity and sorority community.

## BY FALL, 2021:

- Virginia Tech should enact a professional staffing structure for the Oak Lane houses based on best practices that maximize the academic success, health, and wellness of the students residing in on-campus fraternity and sorority houses.
- Virginia Tech should design an overall wide-ranging communication strategy with the goal of attracting broader pools of students who have clear expectations of the values of fraternities and sororities, especially related to inclusion and sense of belonging.

## BY 2022:

- Virginia Tech should develop a comprehensive plan for growing and supporting the overall diversity of students participating in fraternity and sorority life, with the goal of meeting or exceeding the overall campus diversity. This should also include Virginia Tech reviewing chapter expansion and reinstatement policies, and revising them as necessary, to create greater access and support for groups focusing on underrepresented and historically marginalized populations.

- Virginia Tech should reinstate the Fraternity & Sorority Life Advisory Council (FSLAC) that meets monthly to guide the above mentioned comprehensive plan, as well as hire a professional staff member whose primary responsibility is to guide efforts to this end.
- Virginia Tech should create and incorporate specific educational and leadership development programs that cater to students in underrepresented groups and strengthen majority students' intercultural competence.

## BY 2023:

- Virginia Tech should provide an on-campus housing option in Oak Lane for culturally-based fraternities and sororities.

## ONGOING:

- Every three years, Virginia Tech should enact a comprehensive study of fraternity and sorority culture. This research endeavor should include a climate study that encompasses campus-wide perception of fraternity and sorority life. Quantitative and qualitative data collection is strongly encouraged to measure student learning from participation in the fraternity and sorority life experience.
- Annually, Virginia Tech sororities and fraternities should receive risk-management programming from Hokie Wellness, specifically regarding the dangers of un-prescribed medications, recreational drugs, and alcohol consumption. Virginia Tech and the Office of Fraternity and Sorority Life must continue to dedicate efforts toward curbing the activities and events that occur within and amongst fraternities and sororities that foster an environment for excessive drinking and drug use. Periodically, a comprehensive assessment should be implemented to determine the drinking culture of a chapter (along with its environment), that would include quantitative and qualitative data regarding the prevalence of alcohol and drug-related issues.
- Under guidance and administration of the Office of Fraternity and Sorority Life, Virginia Tech should require an off-campus event planning document, sufficiently in advance of any event or activity, as a way to increase the visibility of, support for, and accountability of those activities and events.
- Virginia Tech should compile and administer a study on how its fraternities and sororities that maintain chapter facilities would benefit from substance-free housing. Of particular concern should be whether a substance-free facility would shift increased, unsanctioned, and poorly managed alcohol consumption to satellite homes.

August 21, 2018

Dear Colleagues,

Virginia Tech periodically reviews major academic and student support programs to assess their alignment with institutional values, mission, and expected student learning outcomes. Included among these programs are sororities and fraternities, which engage approximately 5,400 students in 51 organizations, 33 of these living in campus housing and 18 residing off-campus. The goals of such reviews are to recognize and validate strengths and accomplishments as well as identify any opportunities for program improvement and necessary actions to accomplish these enhancements.

In the spirt of our collective commitment to continual improvement and advancing the learning experiences of our students, I am appointing a commission to review the Fraternity & Sorority Life Culture at Virginia Tech and make strategic planning recommendations. Dr. Frank Shushok has agreed to chair this commission and this letter serves as your invitation to participate. I hope you will join other students, faculty, and staff in this important work.

The following questions will guide the work of the commission:

- What is the commission's assessment of the culture of fraternity and sorority life at Virginia Tech in regard to: alignment with the Virginia Tech Principles of Community; student wellbeing and safety; academic success; alignment with developmental goals of living-learning communities at Virginia Tech; and Virginia Tech Aspirations for Student Learning?
- What data are available to assess the culture of fraternity and sorority life and, if the information currently available is insufficient, what additional information needs to be collected?
- Moving forward, are there any strategies and/or actions that could enhance the culture of fraternity and sorority life as well as position Virginia Tech as a national leader?

The Commission on Fraternity and Sorority Life Culture at Virginia Tech will begin its work in September 2018 and will meet six times from noon-2:30 PM on one Friday a month through March 2019. Lunch will be provided. Dr. Shushok will convene this Commission and provide all necessary support for your work. Your discussions will culminate with a final report due to the Provost's Office no later than May 1, 2019.

I hope you are able and willing to serve in this important capacity. Please e-mail Shannon Harvey (snharvey@ vt.edu) no later than August 31 to let her know if you are willing to participate.

Thanks in advance for your valuable contributions to Virginia Tech.

Sincerely,

Cyril R. Clarke
Interim Executive Vice President and Provost

# APPENDIX B: IN-TEXT REFERENCES

[i] Nair, A. (2017, October 9). Greek life on campus: An asset and a challenge. Insight into Diversity.
       Retrieved from https://www.insightintodiversity.com/greek-life-on-campus-an-asset-and-a-challenge/

[ii] Pascarella, E. T., & Terenzini, P. T. (2005). How college affects students: A third decade of research.
      San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.