



Tau Kappa Epsilon International Fraternity

What is the Cure for a Dying Chapter?

Celebration and enthusiasm surround the chartering of a new chapter. The chartering ceremony is a solemn one, conducted by the national president. Several other fraternal officials and neighboring chapters are on hand to assist with the installation procedures. The ceremony is then followed by a formal banquet which includes speeches, special presentations, and toasts in which alumni and undergraduates alike dedicate themselves to the long term success and prosperity of a new chapter. However, what happens when a chapter dies? Certainly, there is no such elation nor farewell banquet.

There is no one answer explaining why chapters fail. In most chapter closings, a few common themes appear over and over again:

- Low membership and failure in rush
- Financial instability and mismanagement
- Loss of housing
- Behavioral and disciplinary problems
- Weak or underdeveloped Greeek systems
- Lack of alumni support
- Hazing incidents
- Sexual assult
- Alcohol and/or other drug abuse

Individually, these problems would cause serious difficulties even for the strongest chapters. More often than not, however, **each problem leads to the development of another**, and soon the chapter is beset by a combination of many fatal impairments.

Lack of an adequate number of members is usually the first problem to appear, and ultimately is the primary cause of a weak chapter's demise. At the onset, failure to rush effectively, or at worst a good rush but few initiations, doesn't appear as a problem because the number of seniors, juniors and sophmores may be adequate to keep the chapter operating for a few years. Then, two years later, the bottom falls out and the chapter is left with only a handful of members who don't know how to recruit any "new blood."

When a chapter's membership declines, income decreases as well, and the problem of financial instability arises. Soon, the chapter is no longer able to maintain its rent or mortgage payments, and may lose the chapter house. Bills to creditors rise to substantial amounts over a brief period of time, and before long the chapter's remaining members are faced with a situation of catastrophic proportions.

In some cases a chapter's behavior and attitude deteriorate to the point where the university or the headquarters is forced to take drastic action, such as removing recognition or suspending university housing privileges.

Experience shows that an active and involved chapter advisor, along with a dedicated alumni board, and additional alumni support provided by a house corporation and alumni associations can prevent a chapter from falling into a deep slump, and possibly losing its charter. Often a chapter that has sunk to a dangerous low can be resurrected by the work of concerned alumni. This is accomplished through an alumni board with the authority to supervise the reorganization of a chapter experiencing difficulty. The board acts in an advisory capacity, and works closely with each chapter officer assisting them in carrying out their duties of their office. The one key determinant in a chapter's ultimate success or failure is the presence of an active and concerned alumni. Alumni involvement provides the continuity so often missing in the undergraduate chapter, and provides a support mechanism for the undergraduates which would be absent were the alumni not involved.

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