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DIVISION OF STUDENT AFFAIRS

# **The North-American Interfraternity Conference**

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**Peter Smithhisler, North-American Interfraternity Conference**

The North-American Interfraternity Conference (formerly known as the National Interfraternity Conference) has a long and storied history as a body that has assisted fraternal organizations to work together. In 1883, in Philadelphia, a Panhellenic Conference was organized to create more harmonious and ethical relationships among existing fraternities. Due to jealousy, suspicion, and intense rivalry, a majority of the 14 fraternities represented did not support the call for a second meeting. In 1909, The Religious Education Association sponsored a meeting in Chicago to which 17 fraternities sent representatives. Positive discussion led to the call for a second meeting to discuss mutual problems and consideration of a Panhellenic Union. Nine months later, on November 27, 1909, 26 fraternities met to discuss critical issues facing fraternities at that time. A formal organization was completed in 1910. In 1931 the organization's name was changed from Interfraternity Conference to National Interfraternity Conference. In 1999, at the annual meeting in Denver, the House of Delegates again changed the name to North-American Interfraternity Conference to celebrate the membership of brothers in Canada.

Today, the NIC has 66 member organizations with 5,300 chapters located on 800 campuses in the United States and Canada with approximately 350,000 undergraduate members. The NIC is led by a Board of Directors comprised of 15 volunteers from member fraternities. It is important to note that neither the Board nor the NIC House of Delegates acts as a governing board. The headquarters and professional staff are located in Indianapolis, Indiana.

## **Mission**

The NIC serves to advocate the needs of its member fraternities through enrichment of the fraternity experience; advancement and growth of the fraternity community; and enhancement of the educational mission of the host institutions. The NIC is also committed to enhancing the benefits of fraternity membership. Each of the member organizations has adopted basic expectations of their members and agreed to the following Nine Basic Expectations.

- I will know and understand the ideals expressed in my fraternity ritual and will strive to incorporate them in my daily life.
- I will strive for academic achievement and practice academic integrity.
- I will respect the dignity of all persons; therefore I will not physically, mentally, psychologically or sexually abuse or harm any human being.
- I will protect the health and safety of all human beings.
- I will respect my property and the property of others; therefore, I will neither abuse nor tolerate the abuse of property.
- I will meet my financial obligations in a timely manner.
- I will neither use nor support the use of illegal drugs; I will neither misuse nor support the misuse of alcohol.
- I acknowledge that a clean and attractive environment is essential to both physical and mental health; therefore, I will do all in my power to see that the chapter property is properly cleaned and maintained.
- I will challenge all my fraternity members to abide by these fraternal expectations and will confront those who violate them.

### **Strategic Plan**

The Board of Directors of the NIC has recently undertaken a major strategic planning process that has produced a number of specific outcomes. A priority for the organization will be to continue to advocate for both the Freedoms of Association and Speech related to fraternities being recognized on college and university campuses.

These two rights are of paramount importance to fraternities and the future expansion of the individual organizations. The strategic plan calls for the NIC to be heavily involved in assisting our member organizations with recruitment. This plan dovetails nicely with another area of importance in the plan and that is the development of an aggressive public relations plan.

Together, these pieces of the strategic plan revolve around the importance of establishing that fraternities play an integral role in the co-curricular experience of each student and serve as a catalyst for personal development. Developing long-lasting and committed relationships with a variety of fraternal partners is another important aspect of the NIC's strategic plan. A key relationship is with campus fraternity/sorority professionals and university personnel. Through a strong relationship with the Association of Fraternity Advisors and the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators, the organizations are able to provide the best support and challenge to the fraternal communities on campuses across the country.

### **Educational Programming**

NIC staff members create learning opportunities for all undergraduate men through a variety of programs, most notably the Undergraduate Interfraternity Institute (UIFI),

IMPACT, Futures Quest, Recruitment Program, Alumni Academy, and the Alcohol Summit. The purpose of the NIC is to promote service, scholarship, the opportunity for self-development, and brotherhood.

The Undergraduate Interfraternity Institute (UIFI) is a five day co-educational program that brings fraternity and sorority leaders together and teaches leadership skills, creates awareness of important issues, and calls on each graduate of the program to lead a change initiative within his/her fraternity/sorority community. The program, begun in 1990, has over 4,600 graduates since its inception. In addition, over 120 fraternity/sorority advisors, staff and volunteers participate each year as facilitators during the program. These facilitators support the work of the NIC staff by leading small group discussions that personalize the experience throughout the institute.

IMPACT is a campus based weekend program that brings fraternity and sorority community leaders together to identify a strategy for change and/or improvement to the local fraternal experience. IMPACT is an acronym for Influence, Motivation, Purpose, Action, Commitment, and Trust. These are the six ideals that the curriculum of the program emphasizes. The campus leaders work together during the course of the weekend to identify what needs to change in order to ensure a bright future for the entire community. The staff of the NIC leads these programs throughout the year.

Futures Quest brings together the newest members of the fraternity community. In order to participate, these men will have joined a fraternity in the previous year. The curriculum of Futures Quest is designed to allow the participants to begin their fraternal journey in a very positive way and builds an awareness of the vast scope of the opportunities that are available to each of them. During the experience, each man will identify a personal action plan for what he wants to accomplish during his years in college and beyond. The participants leave the program with a feeling of confidence and their self-esteem is affirmed. This in turn positively influences the fraternities as these men assume leadership positions.

The most important aspect of the fraternal experience may be the need to invite new members to join a fraternity each year. As a result, the NIC offers a program to our members that teaches participants new skills in recruitment and focuses on the positive aspects of membership. The Recruitment Program is one of the most important programs offered by the NIC. Not only does it ensure that membership in fraternities will continue, it also teaches vital skills that each participant can use beyond the fraternal experience. The program makes the direct statement "If you want to recruit me, then you better have a plan." The goal of the program is that every participant has a plan of action for their recruitment goals.

Programs are offered for alumni members of fraternities as well. Vital to the success of the undergraduate chapters is the importance of having chapter advisors and alumni mentors. The Alumni Academy is an opportunity for alumni members of fraternities to identify ways to serve the fraternity as a chapter advisor, house corporation member and/or mentor. In addition, the alumni are re-educated about the purpose of fraternity in the lives of young men and the newer aspects of the fraternity experience in today's society. Finally, the academy forms a community from the alumni boards that are on each campus. It brings together the alumni role models, getting them to solve campus issues while recognizing the effectiveness of teamwork.

The NIC is always seeking ways in which it may develop new initiatives to enhance the work of its member organizations. In 2000, the NIC received a \$750,000 cooperative grant from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. This signaled the beginning of efforts to reach into the college community and have students determine the best course of action to take to deal with the number one issue on college campuses - alcohol. The Alcohol Summit is designed to bring together a coalition of students to discuss alcohol issues and create lasting outcomes to address the effects of alcohol and high risk drinking behaviors.

## **Resources**

Resources offered by the NIC are intended to support the work of campus advisors and fraternity staff members. The resources fall into two categories: Information Network and Educational.

Information Network resources include the important and popular Interfraternity Directory. The directory is a listing of every NIC, NPC, NPHC and NALFO member group, a leadership directory of fraternal organizations, and a listing for every campus that has a fraternity community.

Interchange is information and resource network comprised of undergraduate Interfraternity Councils. The tiered structure of the program allows IFCs to join based on the number of fraternities currently recognized on campus. Information is regularly distributed, both electronically and via mail, to the councils for distribution on campus. Educational resources to be used by the councils are distributed to Interchange members on a quarterly basis. Interchange members also receive a reduced cost on supplemental educational resources and reduced fees to attend NIC programs such as UIFI and Futures Quest.

A series of Awards of Distinction are presented to undergraduates and alumni for service to fraternities beyond the standard of membership. These awards, presented regionally, recognize outstanding service that advances the ideals of the fraternal movement. Because of these men's willingness to serve and give, fraternities are advanced and the ideals realized.

Educational Programs can be purchased through the NIC. These programs contain everything that a campus/council/fraternity needs to conduct the program. Curriculum includes information and instructions about activities, processing questions, follow-up measures, and programming alternatives. Topical areas covered by resources are Membership Development, Risk Management, Public Relations, Ritual and Values Education, Leadership Development, Community Relations and Community Service, Officer Development, Recruitment, Greek Week Resource Kit, Alcohol Free Housing, Diversity, Hazing, and Personal Development. Detailed descriptions of each resource are found at the resources and services section of the NIC's web page at [www.nicindy.org](http://www.nicindy.org).

## **Resolutions**

A series of resolutions adopted by the NIC House of Delegates (voting body) are important documents with which the fraternal community should become familiar. Intended to act as a guide, not a mandate, the resolutions outline the NIC's position on a number of serious topics including Freedom of Association, Freedom of Speech, Hazing, Recruitment, New Member Education, the Dignity of Others, and a variety of other issues. These resolutions are available in their entirety at [www.nicindy.org](http://www.nicindy.org) and a number of important and often-requested resolutions are found toward the back of the Interfraternity Directory.

## **Future**

The future of the NIC and fraternal organizations for men will be drastically different. Fraternities will thrive in the next decade, with the main emphasis turning to individual responsibility and personal fulfillment. The founding values of fraternities will resonate loudly with the matriculation of the latest cohort of students being called the Millennials (Brownstein, 2000). The Millennial Generation is projected to have a greater personal commitment to teamwork and community service, which connects to the values of group success and service for others within fraternities. This generation is also projected to have a sense of group responsibility that also matches the fraternal experience.

Fraternity housing of the future will emphasize smaller houses, sleeping no more than 25-30 men. Greek Villages, with stringent restrictions, will be created to partner with campus/university administrators who will not tolerate dysfunctional behavior.

Safety will be a major concern. All fraternity housing will contain house-directors and will be alcohol free. Sprinkler systems will be in every fraternity structure. Pledgeship or Associate Membership in a fraternity will be reduced to periods of one month or less in order to reduce the number of hazing incidents. Hazing will not fit with the Millennial's value structure. Fraternity grade point averages will be above the all-men's average GPA on 85 percent of campuses. As a result of the return to our founders' principles, alumni contributions will be at all time highs. Respect for fraternity membership will have returned.

## **Public Relations Effort**

The NIC will begin an era of research and development related to targeting a distinct market of individuals interested in joining a fraternity. Preliminary internal research indicates time, resources, energy, and message should be focused on high school juniors and seniors. Great effort must be made to influence this group to consider membership in a fraternity. The target group needs to be exposed to the values of the fraternity culture and be given the opportunity to see that their personal value structure can match that of a fraternity. This effort needs to occur prior to the target group entering the college environment.

Support from the university community is essential to the success of the NIC public relations initiatives. Through solid partnerships, the fraternity and university communities recruit a solid student base and this will have a positive effect on the retention of these students in college and within the fraternity.

### Reference:

Brownstein, A. "The Next Great Generation?" *Chronicle of Higher Education*, Oct. 13, 2000, pp. A71-A72.

From *Advising Fraternities and Sororities Manual*. Association of Fraternity Advisors.