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"Greeks across the nation share similarities, differences"
By Megan R. Rooney

From the outside looking in, all Greek houses can seem the same. This "at a glance" conclusion could not be further from the truth.

Each fraternity and sorority has a different academic, service and social focus.

At the University of Nebraska-Lincoln alone, there are nearly 3,000 Greek students. This is roughly 17 percent of the full-time, undergraduate population.

Percentages of students involved in the Greek system are similar at UNL, Kansas State University, the University of Kansas and the University of South Dakota.

There are standard fraternities and sororities, as well as multicultural, historically African-American and honorary Greek letter organizations. Each chapter has its own members and its own ties to a national organization. The houses vary, but all are based on the same principles.

"All fraternities and sororities are based on four principles: scholarship, leadership, service and philanthropy and, finally, sisterhood and brotherhood," said Scott Jones, the director of Greek Affairs at KSU.

Many Greek systems, including UNL's, pride themselves on attaining and maintaining GPAs that are routinely higher than non-Greek students'.

Cody Siewert, USD's Greek Life adviser, believes that scholastic achievement begets more scholastic achievement.

"I think our Greeks do a good job finding students that excel at that area. The other part of the equation is that they provide a lot of resources and expect that they hold to a higher academic standard," Siewert said. "We take the best students."

This is not an empty boast. USD's Greek students collectively have a GPA that is .15 to .2 points higher than the collective non-Greek GPA.

Each Greek chapter is part of a national organization as well. Most of these organizations have a specific philanthropy that all chapters are encouraged to contribute to in some way, shape or form.

Many fraternity and sorority chapters are happy to contribute to the national philanthropy, but they do not want to just throw money at a problem in some other area code.

"(KU's) chapters are really good about reaching out to local groups. The specific work that they will do will be for the Douglas County United Way, for example," said Laura Bauer, KU's program director for Fraternity and Sorority Life.

"While they do participate in the national service projects, they do a great job of reaching out locally as well."

With more than 40 Greek chapters on campus, UNL students can have a difficult time figuring out which house is right for them. Regardless of their choice, they can look forward to finding a community.

"I think for a lot of students, it's an opportunity to make a connection on campus. When you're on a large campus, that can be a key to making a positive transition to college," said Linda Schwartzkopf, UNL's director of Greek Affairs. "Though it certainly isn't the only way."

Deciding to join the Greek system does not automatically mean that a student moves into a house. Some universities provide all-Greek floors in the residence halls. Others have a so-called Greek row, where houses for individual chapters are owned and maintained by nonprofit housing corporations, usually made up of members of the specific chapter's alumni.

The UNL Greek System is not monolithic. Some have houses, others do not. UNL requires unmarried students younger than 19 after the first day of classes with less than 27 credit hours and freshmen younger than 19 to live in university-approved housing or with a parent or immediate relative within 30 miles of UNL's campus for his or her first academic year, according to University Housing's Web site.

To allow students more options in their housing decision, chapters are encouraged to request recognition as university-approved housing.

This recognition application outlines the obligations for chapter members, including abiding by the university's alcohol policies. A live-in adviser is also required, Schwartzkopf said.

On many campuses, only the city police have access and jurisdiction in Greek living units. This is not the case for UNL chapters seeking recognition as university-approved housing. Chapters agree to grant access to the University Police's community service officers seven days a week, 24 hours a day. This openness to inspection is somewhat unique to UNL.

"There was a point in time where university administration felt that Greek chapters weren't always enforcing university policy to the extent that it was being enforced in residence halls," Schwartzkopf said.

"In an effort to make enforcement equal, the approved housing agreement was developed."

Greek systems are the sum of their parts. Scholars, athletes, social planners and many more come together to build a house where they all can succeed. The four principles of scholarship, leadership, service and friendship are meant to inform all that Greek chapters do.

"Within the university perspective, we are a complement to the academics side of school. These students go to class every day and learn a lot of skills that are essential to their future careers," Siewert said.

"They go to their fraternity or sorority and learn networking skills, studying skills, skills that you don't necessarily learn in class."
