

## Positive Expectations: Engaging New Chapter Members

You want your new members to grow and learn through affiliation with your organization and at the same time, you want them to feel like they worked hard to achieve something great—the privilege of wearing the letters you value. You want to challenge them AND you want to do that in a way that isn't hazing. Below are a few ideas for activities that challenge new members to work together, test their personal courage, and teach them new skills.

**Step 1:** Think about what you want new members to know about your organization and how activities can achieve those goals while reflecting your organization's values.

### Possible Goals of a New Member Program

- Encourage individual leadership development
- Promote adjustment to college life
- Build respect for each individual
- Stimulate intellectual growth
- Promote an understanding of the fraternity or sorority's history and goals
- Promote social skills
- Provide an environment where all members can express their opinions safely
- Promote friendship among all members

**Step 2:** What activities and events can safely accomplish the goal(s)? See ideas on the next page.

**Step 3:** Evaluate the options and select an activity.

- Talk with other members to determine interest level. Don't assume what your chapter will or won't be interested in doing. You may be surprised!

**Step 4:** Make it clear to participants that all activities are "challenge by choice," meaning that each person feels comfortable not participating should the activity be too challenging for them. Anything that is excessively challenging does not help people learn. It actually results in the opposite—they shut down. If new members are afraid to say 'no' they can't really consent to an activity.

**Step 5:** Lead a discussion following the activity to talk about what everyone learned. Help make connections with your organization's values. This is the most important part of the activity! Sample questions include:

- What was challenging about this activity?
- What did you learn about yourself?
- What would you do differently if you could do it over?
- What did you learn about the group?
- How does this relate to being a new member in this organization?
- How can you take what you learned and apply it to the fraternity/sorority?

Please note: Do not do any advanced physical activities without a trained guide or facilitator with you.

Adapted from materials developed at Worcester Polytechnic Institute

### **Goal: Leadership Development**

- Invite staff from your student activities/engagement office to attend a chapter meeting to give an overview of programs and/or provide a leadership program.
- Ask new members to identify someone in the chapter they think is a leader. Interview the person to learn more about their background and goals. Present a five-minute summary at a chapter meeting.
- Work with the Fraternity/Sorority Life, Student Activities/Engagement or the community services clearinghouse to develop a plan for improving your philanthropy events.
- Have a competition for new members to see who can develop the best recruitment plan (or scholarship plan).
- Invite someone from the Career Center to talk with the chapter about how to market skills gained from chapter participation when applying for a job or graduate school.

### **Goal: Self-Knowledge**

- Ask new members to set aside 1-2 hours with their big brother/sister. Ask them to talk about what the chapter means to them, how they will become better because of it, and how they will positively contribute.
- Ask parents of all the new members to send a letter of support to their son/daughter as a surprise. Read them or give them to new members during the final day of the new member program.
- Invite a faculty or staff member to teach mindfulness/meditation exercises at a new member or chapter meeting.
- Ask new members to write a paragraph about the values they think the chapter represents based on their experience prior to initiation—see how close they get. That will tell you if the chapter is living its values in a visible way to others.
- Attend a program on diversity, equity and inclusion or request a custom program for your chapter.

### **Goal: Brotherhood/Sisterhood Relationship Building**

- Schedule with campus recreation for a climbing training class, GPS orienteering challenge, or time on the challenge course. On the challenge course, mental and physical team building activities are conducted by a trained facilitator. These activities also develop group unity, leadership, and conflict management. **Note:** Do not do physical activities without a trained guide or facilitator with you.
- Schedule a time with campus recreation to learn a new sport (water polo, squash, pickleball, etc.) or to learn correct use of equipment. New members can then teach the sport to the entire chapter.
- Take a hike together as a new member class or for the entire chapter.
- Ask new members to create a game show to teach fraternity/sorority history. Have them present the show with the chapter members as participants. By teaching the history, new members are much more likely to retain the information and it's also a great refresher for members. This activity also teaches presentation skills, self-confidence, and organization.
- Divide the chapter into two groups. Give each group a box full of miscellaneous materials, including paper, markers, tape, scissors, etc. Give them one hour to devise a competitive game using all of the items (only rules: everyone must play, no alcohol and no risk of injury). Have each group play the other team's game.

### **Goal: Accountability**

- Work with the Fraternity/Sorority Life, Student Activities/Engagement or the community services clearinghouse to find local community service needs. Ask new members to do an hour of community service as a class each week during the new member period.
- Host a training on bystander intervention. People who understand the bystander effect are more likely to act.
- Have each "family" within the fraternity/sorority cook breakfast for the chapter. Give a prize for the best breakfast.
- Ensure that house clean-ups are for all members, not just new members.
- Ask new members to write a "letter to the founders" to thank them for the opportunity to join the fraternity/sorority.