

A Military Concept Applicable to Greek Life Chapter Housing – The Chapter Duty Officer

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[Audience:
National
Fraternities/Local
Fraternity
Chapters]

*The Wall Street
Journal, The New
York Times, The
Atlantic* and
several other

prominent publications have reported on college undergraduates misbehaving under the banner of their fraternal organization. Much to the dismay of university and college administrations, their national headquarters, and institutional alumni, sometimes the results of this misconduct are lethal.

The Staff Duty Officer Role

The concept of a Staff Duty Officer (SDO) was developed by the United States military to serve as a deterrent against peers or subordinates who may have bad intentions towards organizational property, members or potential members. A prerequisite of this role is that he/she is a trained and responsible leader with the fortitude to intervene early when members of the organization step out of line.

A Staff Duty Officer is typically assigned a twenty-four-hour shift during which the SDO is entrusted with the safety and welfare of a certain number of soldiers and a good amount of property. This would include

members of the organization, authorized guests, buildings, adjacent property and everything within and or assigned to that building. An SDO is expected to properly react to all sorts of situations, including medical emergencies, military or civilian police investigations, drunk and/or disorderly soldiers, etc. The SDO also keeps others informed of a quiet evening, or mundane actions taken during his or her shift. The SDO has contact information for third party partners who can provide assistance in any circumstance. This may include, but would not be limited too; the chain of command, area hospitals, mental health professionals, local security, building and grounds key control personnel, area shelters, local police and fire & rescue personnel, the public affairs officer, etc.

If we want to change the national conversation about fraternities and sororities and change the misconception that fraternities relish their elitist drinking club image, then we need to purposefully train our members to adhere to a positive code of conduct, teach them how we deter others from breaching the code of conduct, and strategically equip trained and ready leaders available to intervene at the hint of impropriety. Risk Management positions and policies have been in place for a number of years with the aim of doing just that. So why haven't they, and how can we insure that those entrusted with a leadership role, such as those that currently exist or the new one being proposed here, will adhere to policy and guide others in doing the same?

As a staff member of a fraternal organization, I firmly attest to the fact that the highest majority of Greek life organizations promote a lifetime of learning, leadership, fellowship, selflessness, community service and philanthropy. These characteristics are highly sought by university and college administrators, potential employers, community leaders, and families. Why is it then that Greek organization relevancy and viability is being questioned? Why do many people see these organizations as a relic of the past on college campuses, and a sanctuary of the entitled and the privileged?

Research suggests that a vertical hierarchy that gives one individual absolute power over another with little supervision creates negative conditions that can spiral out of control. An active chapter advisory board helps, as does standardized training for members about the dangers of hazing or other forms of bad behavior. However, when member accountability comes from within the organization, a positive and proactive approach for deterrence can be established.

IS THIS STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURE RIGHT FOR YOUR FRATERNITY OR CHAPTER?

A QUICK CHECK:

- a. Is the course of action Suitable to your chapter?
- b. Is this course of action Acceptable to your membership?
- c. Is this course of action Feasible to implement?
- d. Is this course of action Sustainable over time and change in leadership?
- e. Can the course of action be successfully resourced?

Advising

A complete and strong complement of advisors (faculty, alum and community members alike) to effectively guide and mentor chapter officers is a first line of defense. Insuring they are well-trained, involved and available to student leaders is key to their success.

Another resource for watching for misconduct and stopping it at its beginnings is the live-in chapter advisor. Possible scenarios that make this concept plausible include (1) on larger campuses, a live-in advisor may be graduate student or a young alum of the chapter; (2) a live-in advisor can be a community person who has had a solid life experience, a positive reputation, and a strong desire to serve others

through an in-house advisor experience; (3) a live-in advisor role could be a natural progression for young leadership consultants who have been immersed in chapter service operations for several years and who have demonstrated sound chapter leadership skills during their undergraduate years. Unfortunately, the quantity of leadership consultants is disproportionate to the many chapters on the national landscape of higher education that require this role. Cost, living space, graduate school options, maturity and sustainability are several drawbacks of this option as well, but finding ways to overcome these barriers could pay large dividends.

Proposing the Chapter Duty Officer

In an answer to some drawbacks and costs of a live-in advisor program, I suggest that the role of the military Staff Duty Officer, and its critical function, correlate very specifically to address college fraternities, and the lingering and unchecked culture of alcohol abuse and/or hazing at many university and college campuses.

The Chapter Duty Officer (CDO) would be a rotating assignment for elected executive committee officers of the chapter. Chapter executive committee members usually number between five and eight officers. A CDO rotation of one executive officer per week, Sunday through Saturday, creates better continuity than a daily rotation. The CDO is in effect much like a head resident or resident assistant of a dormitory or resident hall.

The CDO would be trained in bystander intervention and understand all of the responsibilities of the task. The CDO would become familiar with the CDO binder that would include standard procedures for contacting campus student life officials, mental health professionals, local hospitals or other first responders, campus security, buildings and grounds personnel, or other important points of contact.

The CDO would know which chapter members were out of the area, who was visiting the house, what campus and chapter events were scheduled for the

week, and who would relieve him or her from their duty the following Sunday morning. The CDO is an elected, trained, and respected peer who would represent a first line deterrence against members of the chapter and guests who might consider violating the chapter's code of conduct. If deterrence fails, the CDO is a ready and responsible member of the chapter executive team who can take positive action to mitigate most situations before tragedy occurs.

Health and safety initiatives, bystander intervention training, and developing a culture of personal courage will only make a difference when those who have the training, skills and the motivation to intervene are present or readily available at the critical point.

To emphasize, if we want to change the national conversation about fraternities and push back on the idea that fraternities are dangerous and irrelevant, then we must more effectively motivate and train our members to adhere to a positive code of conduct, teach them how to deter others from breaching that code, and if all else fails, give them the power, skills, and authority to intervene to prevent a tragedy.

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Learning Values and Challenging Misconceptions – Prevention Guidelines for Fraternities and Sororities; EVERFI Authors Helen Stubbs, Alan Berkowitz, and Rob Buelow

- Heavy-episodic and problematic drinking rates among first year Greeks persist at double the rate of all first-year students
- Hazing feeds on the need for individuals to belong to a group, and their fear of being rejected by it.
- 2% of male students in the general population indicated that they had perpetrated sexual violence compared to 13% of fraternity men.

— EverFi survey of 200,000 participating students

Fraternity and sorority members feel stereotyped and unappreciated for what they do, which in turn fosters an adversarial, defensive, circle the wagons mentality that makes outside intervention to address high-risk behavior all the more difficult.

These paradoxes offer an opportunity for chapters and organizations to leverage the positive and healthy attitudes within their ranks.