

August 20, 2019

MIAMI'S EVOLVING RELATIONSHIP WITH ITS FRATERNITIES

After the Friday morning meetings at the house I was "invited" to a meeting of House Directors and Advisors sponsored by the Student Activities and Cliff Alexander Office of Fraternity and Sorority Life. That's a long title for a group that is currently without a Director. Adam and Connie were the Associate Directors in charge and they did a pretty good job of engaging resources that would be helpful in dealing with House and student issues. These ranged from Oxford and Campus Police to University Health and Wellness counselors to a Title IX Coordinator. By and large good folks and valuable resources.

The attendees were an interesting mix. There were only about 20+ people there for a "required" meeting, apparently because several of the houses lost their "Sophomore Exemption" for a variety of reasons. Probably the most common was a drop of over 10% in new member GPA between first and second semester. Of those present I was probably the oldest, challenged only by the long-term Beta House Mother. Most of the new Directors were Graduate Assistants with a couple approaching middle age. Interesting group with some strong opinions.

The "Sophomore Exemption" is an interesting Miami tradition. Basically, the only way a Sophomore can get out of University Residence halls is by joining a Fraternity... and the standards for joining are being raised. Starting with this year's "rush" (my old term... the official title is "New Member Recruitment"), you must have a 2.75 GPA to join a fraternity, up from 2.5 last year. And as mentioned earlier, if the "pledge class" (another archaic term) GPA drops by 10% from Fall to Spring, you have no ability for them to move in. A good term for this is "Kiss of Death"! How does a House survive when most who live in are Sophomores (in our case 27 of 29), a product of the highly aggressive Oxford Apartment market.

A good chunk of the active discussion was around whether the University is "Honoring Fraternities" (their term and one of their programs) or challenging their right to exist. Miami is known nationally as "Mother of Fraternities" with 4 Alpha Chapters and the established history of Alpha Delta Phi as the "First Fraternity West of the Alleghenies and First on Miami's Campus". While acknowledging that "Greek" students have higher academics, retention and social contribution (service and philanthropic) than "non-affiliated", they are focusing on (justifiably) cracking down on the abuses. This ambivalence will be an ongoing part of the story.

One of the more interesting parts of the afternoon was a survey we took rating House Director responsibilities. On a scale of 1 (essential) to 5 (absolutely not), how did each of 20 statements apply to your perception of your role. One of the questions was "Be responsible for the Chapter's actions." The response was almost universal... a 5. I challenged that thought process. "How do you model responsibility without taking responsibility?" I felt that the group had immediately translated responsibility to blame or fault. Good discussion followed. The last question was "Be a friend to the chapter first and House Director second". We all agreed that was a 5... thank goodness!