



A Moment for Grove City College

My moment for Grove City College this time will be on a single topic, namely that of fraternities and sororities. Although it is a single item, the Greek system is viewed quite differently by graduates of different eras. Questions about the topic abound and we bumped into many of them over the past few years. It is a topic heard at alumni meetings and events, it is a topic often raised when we have visited and asked for donations or just written to ask for financial help. So I want to spend this time with you to talk about it and perhaps dispel some myths and share with you some views as to the past, present and future of the Greek system at the College. I will talk straight, to the point, and invite your understanding and your further comments.



To many of our alumni from the 1930s until probably the early to mid 1980s, the Greek system was paramount in campus student social life. We all remember Grove City College through the prism of our four years as a student. Those memories frequently center on friends, fraternity and sorority brothers and sisters, and a favorite professor or two. Those are the ties that most bind us to the College. Certainly my years as a member of Kappa Alpha Phi fraternity were most memorable and enjoyable and I count many good friends and colleagues from my fraternity more than 40 years later!

In the mid 1980s a number of factors were occurring that caused a decline in the Greek system both nationally and at Grove City College. On a national basis, while national culture became more tolerant and socially permissive, some Greek participants engaged in excessive behavior. At the same time, students were finding many more clubs and associations on their campuses forming around academic, religious, and athletic interests in which socialization was also readily available.

Locally, Grove City College reflects national developments and today Greeks no longer are the only option on campus, as more than 100 student organizations compete for the extracurricular time and attention of our student body.

Accordingly, the Greek system has greatly declined on a national basis and, unlike Grove City, boards of trustees at schools such as Williams, Bowdoin, Colby, Waynesburg and many others have eliminated their Greek systems completely.

In addition to the factors affecting Greek life I mentioned above, two other factors external to our campus were taking place in Pennsylvania. First, the administration of Gov. Bob Casey proposed and had passed strong anti-hazing legislation with criminal penalties to get control of some sordid practices used in initiation practices. To be frank, a number of the "rites of passage" (physical and mental) that occurred at Grove City College and all other schools were no longer permitted, and, in fact, put colleges that tolerated these actions in legal jeopardy, and the students that directed such actions in personal criminal jeopardy. Next was the question of alcohol. Vigorous enforcement of the drinking laws, especially underage drinking, was initiated—again putting individuals who were at parties in jeopardy at what were deemed to be College-sponsored events because it was an event held by a College recognized club or group. Accordingly, the College moved toward a more strict enforcement policy concerning alcohol that was both required by the changing legal climate and

mandated by the College's values such as maintaining a climate of respect for law and a climate of respect by and between students as well as for property. Off-campus housing was abolished and, over a considerable period of time, student life on campus was reinvigorated as most students (except those that were married and commuters) were asked to live on campus and abide by our traditional rules and regulations.

For all the above reasons, the interest in Greek life began to wane. At its height, more than 60% of Grove City College students belonged to fraternities and sororities. Today there are eight sororities and 10 fraternities but only 11% of female students are in sororities while only 9% of males are in fraternities. Membership is not robust to say the least. On the other hand, there are 9 housing groups that are identified by Greek letters that date back 20 years that are thriving and have many attributes of the older "local" GCC fraternities.

With the past and present identified, let me make a number of observations, comments and a promise. First, in my numerous travels as a trustee to alumni events and my many talks with alums I have heard folks say, "The College is trying to get rid of the Greek system." That is absolutely not true. In reality, all a president with a concurring board had to do was say, "That's it, let's get rid of the Greek system" (as many other schools have done). But that didn't happen. The Greek system is a tradition like many other traditions at Grove City College. Heritage, as we all know, is an important component of our College culture. Last year, in fact, the board adjusted Greek policies to permit those organizations that had been suspended to more easily regain their full status as a campus organization.

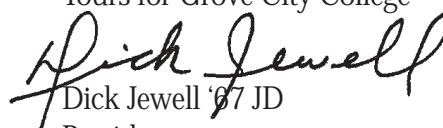
Candidly, there are some alumni and current students who have negative feelings toward Greeks because of questions related to their perceived exclusivity and conduct. I understand those concerns.

So what is the future? I want to see Greek life be reinvigorated at the College, not to take the place of the many fine organizations that have been organized over the past few years, but to complement them and all of campus life. Students who join the Greek system should be proud of their choice and association and should want to use their membership not to wall themselves off from other groups and students. And those who choose not to go Greek should respect those who do and not wall themselves off from beneficial friendships and good contacts with those who have chosen to go Greek.

We can have a Greek system that builds up, unites, does beneficial things and has fun doing it but also **reflects the mission of the College**. This is the path to success for a reinvigorated Greek system. Accordingly I have asked some grads who were in the Greek system – some of whom are current professors like Dr. John Sparks and Dr. Ralph Carlson – and others to join me in helping our Greek system to become successful. This will not be an easy task and it will take time as we draw other alumni and interested parties into the discussion.

Our new Board Chairman, David Rathburn '79 (Nu Lambda Phi) shares my beliefs about the contributions and heritage of our Greek System and stands with me in the analysis and proposals expressed herein.

I will do my best in considering the matter, and will keep you informed.
And **that is a promise**.

Yours for Grove City College

Dick Jewell '67 JD
President