

# Greek Life and the Community: Combatting High-Risk College Drinking

A policy proposal by

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Last September, Penn State was thrust into the national spotlight after the Princeton Review released its annual rankings of the nation's top universities, bestowing PSU with the dubious honor of the "Number 1 Party School." The issue was exacerbated by the high-profile death of Penn State freshman Joseph Dado last September, culminating in a feature on NPR's *This American Life*. While the issue has faded from the headlines, the core problem of High-Risk College Drinking (HRCDD) remains unaddressed as a chorus of community advocates inundates the opinion pages with anecdotes and observations of the latest weekend debauchery.

Central to the debate surrounding HRCDD, the Interfraternity Council (IFC) at Penn State has moved forward with a number of policies intended to curb the dangerous drinking habits associated with fraternity gatherings and repair the tarnished reputation of the Greek Community. While the new rules and restrictions acknowledge the role of fraternities in collegiate drinking culture, they fail to address the fundamental concerns of school administration and community leaders alike and will likely have little long-term impact.

The research and discussion of the past several months have revealed two recurring themes in Penn State's drinking culture: perception and reality. The first encompasses the expectations and myths surrounding the alcohol consumption – our common imagination and the cultural constructs that shape the perception of fraternities in a collegiate environment. According to this theme, colored by popular media and comic depictions in film and on television, fraternities are vilified for their loose mores and seemingly insatiable appetite for alcohol and mayhem.

But the research reveals a second side to the story, a reality that defies the commonly held stereotypes, where the Greek Community is a member and servant to the local community. Unfortunately, as the old adage goes, perception is reality – innocuous truths are exaggerated and translate into an attitude that perpetuates the detrimental behavior. These conflicting identities are central to

HRCDC and any policies should endeavor to reconcile the Greek role in the greater community.

To this end, the Presidential Leadership Academy (PLA) sub-committee on Greek Life proposes several new policies meant to foster communications and repair relationships between State College residents, University administration, and the Greek community. By addressing the current levels of hostility, these recommendations, if implemented, will endeavor to create an atmosphere conducive to community building. With stronger community ties in place, students will be less likely to vandalize local neighborhoods, and residents will likely reciprocate hospitable behavior. Similar partnerships have been shown to reduce crime in cities across the United States (Morris) and may work to help combat the current drinking culture at Penn State. This sub-committee acknowledges and endorses the many steps already taken by the Interfraternity Council but also believes additional steps can be taken to reduce the dangerous consumption of alcohol.

## RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

The IFC has acknowledged that the drinking culture at Penn State needs to change because the current state of affairs acts as a wedge between students and the residents of State College. The University is also a major stakeholder in the actions of the Greek Community. For example, the Greek lifestyle tends to heighten the party school image, which burdens Penn State and harms the academic reputation of the entire University. It would benefit both the municipality and the University to better integrate Greeks into the community.

In a recent interview, Dan Cartwright, Vice President of Communications for the IFC, described the relationship between the Greek community and local residents as hostile in previous semesters. To address this issue, the IFC instituted a number of changes this spring: all recruitment events have become

alcohol free, new recruits cannot attend social functions where alcohol is present, and parties must be monitored by a non-affiliated private security agency in order to verify guests on a mandated list. Additionally, the Commitment to Outreach and Responsible Education initiative (CORE) is in place as part of a broader initiative to shift towards “values-based recruitment,” which emphasizes community service and leadership over the party culture that has become synonymous with fraternities.

According to Cartwright, this transition will take several years to complete (at least three to five) as newer students replace the current leadership and filter out the less desirable traditions of Greek Life. He reiterated many times that this approach *needs* times to work, and the University and community can aid the process by giving it a chance. HRCD is a symptom, not the disease, to the larger problem Penn State faces, and if given a few years, the potential to decrease the dangerous consumption of alcohol. Recent statistics show a third of high school students engage in binge drinking (“Annual Assessment”), a number that indicates an epidemic and not an isolated case. Consequently, reactive measures intended to cover up the ugly sores of the past academic year will likely lack the long-term characteristics necessary to combat this issue as it relates to Greek Life.

Although the steps taken by the IFC are constructive measures that will help alleviate problems associated with High-Risk College Drinking, these new regulations fall short of having the strength to influence significant change. In brief, the policies adopted by the IFC are largely focused on curtailing the actions that occur within fraternity residences. It remains necessary, however, to improve upon the rocky situation that exists outside of the fraternity homes. As a result of frequent loud parties, vandalism, violence, crime, public urination, and general unruliness, the local State College residents share a tense relationship with the Greek Community. Additional initiatives focused on repairing and rebuilding an improved Greek/ municipality relationship appear necessary in order to harness the problems that have developed as an offshoot of HRCD.

## BENEFITS

Under Luke Pierce, former IFC president, new policies were enacted to help curb High-Risk College Drinking and increase student safety. For example, the inability for potential members to attend social functions at fraternities between the start of registration until formal recruitment—unless registered through the IFC—is a small step towards taking control of the drinking problem. Pierce stated that the primary focus of creating these new rules was “to enhance the recruitment experience for potential new members,” according to one Collegian source (Sellers, 2010). With the change of IFC presidents, from Pierce to the sitting President Max Wendkos, more potentially beneficial policies have been created.

For the spring semester of 2010, a Dry Rush policy was enacted, thus making all recruitment events alcohol free. Any recruits who violate this policy will be immediately removed from the recruit roster. In addition, a fee of \$1,000 will be levied upon fraternities who violate the policy (Boyle and Cole, 2010). A further amendment prohibits any potential new member from attending a social event where alcohol is present (Boyle, 2010). In theory, this is an excellent deterrent from new members drinking. If pledges are not pressured to consume exorbitant amounts of alcohol, they might not find the need to drink when accepted into the fraternity. This policy ultimately forces recruits to be safer when attending a registered social event. “With this new recruitment program,” said Wendkos in an interview, “we are looking to, one, ensure safety of our recruits, and two, provide for our fraternities a recruitment of students that would reflect the values that our organizations were founded upon” (Boyle and Cole, 2010).

Although the IFC initially anticipated a tough “period of adjustment” to the Dry Rush policy, this semester boasted larger recruitment numbers than last spring. According to the IFC, 323 offers were extended during spring 2010 recruitment, and 274 bids were accepted (84%). In comparison, only 184 out of 282 offers were accepted in 2009 (65%). These figures suggest students are less interested in the drinking aspect than conventional wisdom allows and are

attracted by other benefits fraternities offer. It is obviously too soon to draw any concrete conclusions – and it may simply be a case of confusing correlation with causality – but this fact does challenge a few assumptions regarding Greek Life and warrants further exploration.

Another policy, which has caused much debate, is the requirement of fraternities to hire a third-party agency to monitor social events. This new system has the IFC selecting a non-affiliated, private security agency that monitors and verifies guests on a mandated list for every social event. In addition, photographic identification of an individual is also checked upon entering a fraternity. The system has received both positive and negative reactions from the community. Students who were used to gaining access to a party by “knowing someone” have been rejected from socials upon arrival. One un-named individual voiced her angered opinion on the subject, stating how she rarely goes to fraternities anymore due to the lists and the third-party system.

Ultimately, the new policy helps prevent unnecessary amounts of people filtering into fraternities and lowers the number of excessively inebriated individuals at one party at a time. The third-party system can potentially lower “party-hopping,” the act of leaving one fraternity to go to another one. In addition, the IFC leadership has mandated that socials will only be held on Thursdays through Saturdays during the normal week—any parties held on other days will be prohibited (PSU Live, 2009).

Greeks have been working diligently on creating a new image for themselves while simultaneously improving Penn State’s. The CORE initiative is an improved version of 2009’s Fraternity rewards for Active Service and Programming. Wendkos has expressed CORE’s importance on promoting the foundational values of all fraternity chapters: community service, philanthropic outreach, and educational programming. The purpose of the program is to show the Greek Community the value of giving back to the greater community, which is a small step towards improving the overall perception of the fraternities. An incentive program is also tied into the initiative, where allowances such as

Wednesday social events will be granted, although on a limited basis. While small programs such as Greek Sweep— where fraternity brothers and sorority sisters clean up the community after events such as football games and State Patty’s Day—are supported by CORE, more steps are needed for the Greeks to improve their image and to work out differences between themselves and those living in the community around them.

Although new rules and regulations have become monthly happenings, Greeks are still attempting to increase participation in activities that may improve the image of brothers. While all of this is good news, many of these restrictions are marked as “tentative,” and if there are no results, the possibility of abolishment is an option. Hopefully these policies have the potential of being successful in the long-term such that Penn State will have the opportunity to witness an end result capable of slowing down the over-consumption of alcohol.

## LIMITATIONS

Opponents of the new rules raise legitimate concerns regarding practicality. Even Cartwright acknowledged that these policies are difficult to implement, a challenge to enforce, and near impossible to quantify the impact. Without a reliable metric for success, fraternities and the IFC will struggle to provide evidence revealing any link between the new policies and any reduction in HRCD.

Additionally, some critics contend that many fraternities maintain a loosely guarded list. According to an anonymous source, the popularity of the fraternity and the type of social has a positive correlation to the strictness of the list. In other words, more popular venues present stricter enforcement and vice versa. Another anonymous individual mentioned the ease of getting into fraternity socials: “With some parties, all you do is show your \*Penn State+ ID. They want to make sure you’re a college student before you’re allowed in.” She also noted how some fraternities stop monitoring the list near midnight, so as to

keep the party continuing until two in the morning, which is the IFC's official end time for parties.

## POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

While there are lingering reservations regarding the reactive policies of the past semester, this "values-based" approach hints at a broader strategy, which should be given an opportunity. But they are also highly visible moves that show the IFC addressing the issue in a way that a long-term strategy cannot. It might be PR, but it also might be necessary. Consequently, any adopted policies should explicitly complement this approach, giving it the necessary "space" to prosper.

Furthermore, a program of fresh policies should aim at addressing, as completely as possible, all facets of the HRCD problem. Keeping this need in mind, the Greek Life Sub-Committee proposes a set of actions whose goal is to promote a healthier relationship between both the Greek Community and the University and between the Greeks and neighboring communities. The Sub-Committee recognizes that altering the perceptions each group holds of one another is paramount to success. To this end, the committee presents a two-tiered set of initiatives that spotlight both student and community-oriented issues.

### 1. STUDENT-ORIENTED PROPOSALS (RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN GREEK COMMUNITY AND UNIVERSITY)

Approximately twelve percent of Penn State undergraduate students are actively involved in Greek Life at the University Park campus, making it one of the largest Greek systems in the nation. The organizations were founded upon core values and greater purposes than being extreme partiers. In fact, these students give back to the University and the community through various outreach and service projects – the most noteworthy being the Penn State IFC/ Panhellenic Dance Marathon, the largest student-run philanthropy in the world.



Although they are not a large percentage of the population, the Greek Community has a very visible presence across the campus. As students begin their college careers and are looking to gain friends, feel accepted and get involved, they should be established academically before pursuing assimilation into the Greek Community. One suggestion that would allow first year students to become better acclimated to campus life is to delay the pledging and rushing process.

A policy like the one proposed is typically referred to as “deferred rush” because it makes first year students ineligible to participate in fraternity or sorority new member recruitment until they have met certain requirements. These requirements range from completing one to two semesters of coursework satisfactorily. The new policy would incorporate the traditional deferred rush process and the need for a “clean” judicial affairs record, the goal being to promote a new level of responsibility for prospective members. The accessibility of one’s judicial records can create concerns for legality and privacy.

To eliminate doubts of other sources gaining access to a person’s account, combining the deferred rush recommendation with an e-lion policy has been proposed (see Clarification Policy proposal). The latter suggests steps to simplify Penn State Judicial Affairs policy, allowing students to read their judicial record on the e-lion website. In addition, this plan would allow students to send the record to the fraternity or sorority of their choice. This could affect the numbers in the pool of eligible recruits for the Greek community, but it would also send a message to the student body and community that Penn State is trying to foster more responsible students. Additionally, such a policy would amplify the notion that rushing and pledging is a privilege not a right.

Knowing the history of a potential recruit would give insight as to whether or not the individual has behaved responsibly while in college. It would also make the students more aware of their actions and the consequences in place if they do not abide by University policy. The goal is not to restrict the activities of

anyone in the student body; however, it is necessary to instill measures that will make everyone more responsible for their actions.

A 2.5 GPA is the standard set forth by the IFC for potential recruits; however, according to their website, "Incoming students with no established cumulative GPA are exempt from this policy." This means that students on Penn State's campuses are allowed to engage in the rush process as soon as they begin their undergraduate careers. Not only does allowing first year students to be exempt narrow the window for students to adjust to the college lifestyle without pursuing a membership for a fraternity or sorority, but it also denies the Greek organizations a fair look at this applicant's track record as a new college student and community member. The first two requirements deal more with the student's behavior academically while the third requirement deals more with how the student handles situations involving alcohol and the community at large.

The IFC should keep in mind new students and how Greek life may affect their habits. Freshman year is a time for students to start finding their own identity. While still trying to find a niche in college life, students are influenced by their peers and environment, which can evoke drastic changes to one's personal identity. For this reason, deferred rush is often a measure taken to create a window of opportunity for new students to become acclimated to a college environment without the extreme pressure or stress that comes along with trying to enter into a fraternity or sorority. For example, Greeks at the University of Virginia instituted a deferred rush policy in 1998, which remains in place today. This policy has not negatively affected the vitality of the fraternity and sorority life at Virginia.

The first year is a crucial time for new students to establish positive study habits and become more aware of the more rigorous course load of college. Learning positive academic skills will help them throughout their college careers. If there is a lack of sufficient time to embody these habits, then there is more of a possibility of being completely unprepared for the college atmosphere. Students

immediately involving themselves with the Greek Community may find the college environment more difficult to manage, due to the sizeable time commitment involved while participating in the pledging and rushing period. For interested first year students, deferred rush will allow more time for academic work, as opposed to engrossing Greek life involvement. Ideally, deferred rush could contribute to instilling a deeper academic tone on campus, as well as helping Penn State to curtail the University's "party school" image.

Already, a precedent exists for restricting the choices and actions of freshmen at Penn State. For example, freshmen are not allowed vehicles their first year. Additionally, freshmen are required to live in the residence halls and purchase campus meal plans. These measures are in place because the University wants students to explore, feel comfortable, and achieve academic success while on campus. The goals of deferred rush would match and enhance the aims of these other rules currently in place.

Although it is important for the Greeks to improve relations with community members, it is also pertinent for them to use their influence to help with the HRCD problem as it relates to the University. For example, there has been discussion surrounding the incorporation of the Greek Community into alternative activities in the downtown area, a Greek brand of Late Night. By coordinating with downtown businesses, fraternities could endorse dry activities as a legitimate alternative to drinking. A program such as this could be wrapped into the community involvement policy, CORE, providing incentives for fraternities to get involved. As opposed to Penn State Late Night, which carries an "un-cool" stigma, alternative, Greek sponsored events might attract students concerned with the "cool" factor.

After analyzing the party times for fraternities and also looking at pre-gaming as a catalyst to HRCD, policies may be enacted to help curb dangerous alcohol consumption as it relates to fraternity partygoers. Although micromanaging fraternities with overarching regulations may be detrimental, the Sub-Committee believes there is room for improvement of policy effectiveness.

The IFC regulated party times at night are from 10:00pm-2:00am. These times have an impact on students drinking excessively, perhaps without their knowledge. Since the times are so late at night, many students do not want to wait that long to go a party, leading to the pre-gaming phenomenon. Pre-gaming is a drinking activity conducted in a private residence prior to a scheduled event. Nevertheless, pre-gaming is a time where mass amounts of alcohol are consumed. It is possible that pre-gaming would decrease if the fraternity time is moved to 9:00pm-1:00am. Also, with parties ending earlier, patrons would be returning to their residences and, consequently, be off the streets earlier in the night.

## 2. COMMUNITY-ORIENTED PROPOSALS (RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN GREEK COMMUNITY AND STATE COLLEGE RESIDENTS)

The relationship between any university or college and the surrounding community is always a unique and tricky situation. A tenuous subset of this interaction is that of the off-campus Greek Life and the surrounding community. This tension is derived from the effects of high risk drinking behaviors and their effect on surrounding neighborhoods. At Penn State, these impacts have been detrimental to the potential for a successful and functioning alliance between the Greek and State College Communities.

Recently, the dissatisfying relationship has been highlighted by a series of articles in local newspapers, national radio programs, panel discussions, and community roundtables. The Sub-Committee on Greek Life suggests concrete policies that will help to mitigate some of the raucous late night behavior. Moreover, the Committee realizes that it is necessary to focus any attempt towards altering the perceptions each has of the other side.

A mutual respect from one community to the other is necessary to forge a working partnership. With an increase of respect, it is the Sub-Committee's ambition that this process will promote the reduction of negative backlash from the State College Community. To accomplish this goal, it is pertinent to increase

the amount of community involvement with Greek Life students and organizations. Although the problems from high risk drinking are not solely due to the drinking habits within Greek Life houses, partnership between Greek Life and the community is significant and deserves focused, specified policies. To realize this goal a multifaceted array of activities, policies, and procedures should be enacted. These include having local chapter advisors, increasing community / Greek events of all types, and boosting the volunteerism of Greeks within the neighboring communities.

More focus and participation from the community appears fundamental in order to build relationships. Cartwright seemed very receptive to the idea and also shared some insight as to what incentives might prove effective, such as improvements and furnishings for the fraternity houses or permission for a Wednesday social.

As one potential measure, the IFC and State College community could consider an Adopt-a-Family program, where fraternities and a partnered sorority “adopt” one of their neighbors. The organization performs simple acts of charity for the family (i.e. cutting the grass, shoveling the walk, hosting a neighborhood barbeque, etc.). That family then serves as a conduit for Greek-community relations. In interviews many of the anonymous Centre County Prevention Coalition members expressed interest in the said program, mentioning it was definitely worth a try (See Appendix 2). This program could operate as part of a two-pronged approach that combines a sustained effort with high-profile events. Cartwright mentioned that the fraternities already participate in occasional Greek Sweeps and a Spring Carnival, which represent this latter category rather well. This policy could aim to expand on these events, utilizing the resources of the school to promote and grow such programs as part of the HRCD cause.

Progress can start to be gained from actions taken within the student and alumni leadership of Greek organizations. For example, the Penn State Interfraternity Council may suggest that all fraternities under its jurisdiction try their hardest to enlist a chapter advisor that is local, rather than from out of

town. A column published the Centre Daily Times, authored by Bill Nickerson, the chapter advisor for the Penn State chapter of Tau Kappa Epsilon (TKE), highlighted a personal account of the difference a local, dedicated advisor can have on the success of a Greek Organization.

Mr. Nickerson, a formal brother of TKE, who lives in the same neighborhood as the chapter house, confers with the notion that although the Greek community is not the only problem source, they should be a major player in any solution to curbing the effects of dangerous alcohol consumption saying, "Fraternities are often viewed as the cause of the problem, but I believe the Greek system needs to and can be part of the solution." Nickerson continues, telling his tale about how he helped to restore the chapter from possible closure to reinstatement. At one point, he makes it clear how important having not only a strong alumni backing is, but also an involved advisor is. He boasts, "I agreed to take on the role of chapter adviser, a position that had been in the hands of an out-of-town brother for many years, probably the most important adult player in keeping a fraternity working smoothly." A solid chapter advisor and alumni mentoring would offer greater oversight and enhanced Greek community connections, as these local advisors or alumni would offer a genuine community perspective.

In addition, Cartwright mentioned that recent meetings and round-table discussions between community and Greek leaders has opened a dialogue between the entrenched sides. The Sub-Committee suggests establishing a permanent council that can build on this early success while demonstrating a commitment from each side. Such a committee would provide a forum for each side to air their respective grievances before problems escalate to calling the police or other legal action. Additionally, the scope of this group would reach beyond HRCD and could become a permanent fixture for "town and gown" relations to build upon.

## CONCLUSIONS

The events of the past academic year have drastically altered the legislative landscape at Penn State. New regulations and restrictions appear at regular intervals as organizations and individuals race for a solution to what is now widely recognized as the University's most pressing issue. Equal parts good intentions and equal parts damage control, the IFC has responded with an abundance of corrective measures intended to curb the dangerous drinking habits commonly associated with Greek Life.

This Sub-Committee proposes an alternative: building on a long tradition of philanthropy and community service to reverse the current image. In turn, local residents and university administration must provide an atmosphere of cooperation and patience, working with student leaders to create a safer, more hospitable environment for both town and gown.

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## APPENDIX I: Greek Week – Another Perspective

*On April 22, 2010, August Dombrow accompanied Officer Jordan Pieniazek of the State College Police Department as he patrolled the Highlands area of State College. Over the course of six hours, between 11PM and 5AM, August observed and interviewed Officer Pieniazek as he conducted his typical duties, resulting in the following article.*

“There’s a frat right there and, on the other side of this building, you have a frat over there. You have frat right here.”

I’m riding with Officer Pieniazek of the State College Police Department as he describes the Highlands area where fraternities, student apartments, and local residences all sit side-by-side. As he speaks, we are surrounded by fraternity houses, and college students wrapped in white sheets migrate between parties. It is Greek Week at Penn State University and tonight the fraternities celebrate their Greek heritage with toga parties.

“The big problem here is, yes, they don’t really cause too much noise, but when the frats release, where do the kids go? They go down to Garner St. And when these kids go, they’re making a bunch of noise. They’re kicking this guy’s fence, punching the tops of them, breaking them. Hopping the fence and going to piss in his yard...it’s to the point that this guy has motion detectors all throughout his yard and has a different chime for each part.”

The house in question rests on the corner, neighbor to one of the many fraternity houses that sit along Prospect Ave and Hamilton Ave. As though to emphasize Officer Pieniazek’s point, a stream of toga-clad students pass us, their conversations punctuating his comments.

“Now, his problem is not the noise. His problem is the vandalism – the people pissing in his yard that hop the fence.”

This would become a common theme for the night, a recurring thought that people do understand they live in a college town and that there will be

parties. Many neighbors will accommodate a reasonable degree of noise, but the other frequent behavior – the public urination, the physical destruction, the unlawful entries – crosses the line for reasonable behavior. We speak a little longer on the topic of frat parties before being interrupted by a call. Bouncers at the Shandygaff Saloon have barred entry to a “visibly intoxicated” young woman and she refuses to depart.

When we arrive outside “The Gaff” (as local patrons call it), another officer is defusing the situation, so we continue our conversation while waiting for the next call. Officer Pieniazek makes it clear that the next call is not a matter of “if” but a matter of “when.” Since we are downtown, I turn the topic towards the local bars and ask if certain bars are more troublesome.

“Used to be Lulu’s and all of them. Now it’s the Mezzanine and 797.”

I ask him to elaborate:

“Well, now that Lulu’s is closed down? Lulu’s, Big Easy, and Candy’s all got shut down because they were deemed by the state to be a trouble bar – because of all the crime and stabbings...that went on there...So everybody who went there now goes to 797.”

As we move through downtown, the streets are thick with people, but all of them are clearly not students. With little prompting, Officer Pieniazek continues.

“Because we get not just students like on Wednesdays and Thursdays, throughout the weekend we get people from Williamsport, Altoona, and Harrisburg. And depending on what’s going on, we get people from Philly, and we get people from Pittsburgh coming to these bars...We get a big influx of different individuals.”

This seems like an appropriate point to bring up State Paddy’s Day, so I ask if, given the statistics of the most recent celebration, he personally observed higher levels of alcohol-related incidents.

“I did. But this year – because of the advertising, meaning the hype that was put on it and the word of mouth from years past – it’s gotten around as far

down as South Carolina and West Virginia, and people are coming into town. 90% of the people arrested that night were from out of town...So then you get all of these other drinking holidays that kids are making up...then the media picks up on that and it just adds to the problem.”

And he’s right. Each passing year has seen increased exposure for the event as local papers cover the opposition from the community and school. The struggle then spills over into the opinion pages where the language can border on hostile at times. Facebook and other social media become a battlefield where supporters rally greater numbers. I mention the possibility that all of this organized resistance might grant a degree of legitimacy to the holiday as a student sub-culture.

“Just by seeing the way that State Paddy’s Day happened this year, I don’t know about ‘rallying against’ because I didn’t see as much student \*involvement + as the out-of-towners again. As far of these new holidays coming up, is it students doing it in spite of what were trying to do? ...Maybe. Or is it just people creating a day to go drink just because it’s the new thing next to bar tours? That might be it too, so who knows?”

We meander back towards the Highlands area where the parties continue into the early-morning hours. I inquire about the “problem” frats.

“Pi-Kap. Delta-Chi. This frat right here, it never causes any problems ever. It’s just a bunch of good old boys sitting inside drinking beer. Only thing you might find in there is a shotgun and maybe some bow-and-arrows. A lot of these frats...they do a lot of drug dealing out of these frats too: X, Coke, and marijuana, of course.”

Despite the presence of illegal drugs, Officer Pieniazek insists the primary issue remains the consumption of alcohol.

“The drugs are always the second thing. Alcohol, especially in this area – 99% of the calls that we have in this area are alcohol related.”

I cite the recent Congressional Quarterly Press report that ranked State College the safest metropolitan area in the country, which he attributes to a ubiquitous police presence:

“I don’t know if you noticed, but cruising around here we passed three police cars in the short amount of time we’ve been here.”

On the topic of deterring undesirably behavior, we discuss pecuniary penalties.

“The way the fines are set up right now, they’re very low...they’re all sliding fines – so there’s play in them – but they cap out at 300... If the max is 300, a lot of people can scrape that up and they don’t really learn their lesson. There’s no consequences for getting multiple offenses for being publicly drunk, really. So, yes, do I think the fines should be raised? Yes. Do I think it will help? Possibly. If I get arrested for PD \*Public Drunkenness+ last week, I just paid a 900 dollar fine, and I can’t go out the rest of the semester...it’s expensive and they cant afford it.”

We debate the efficacy of punitive measures, as I mention the poor record in actually reducing crime. The conversation segues into the impending Nuisance Gathering Ordinance, which would hold hosts responsible for the behavior of party guests.

“I think it will help out a lot, especially with the frats and the parties they have. The way I understand it, we shut down a house and a group of people comes from that house and they’re pissing outside – leaving the party causing criminal mischief – this party is a problem. It’s a nuisance, and I think that the host of the party is not being a responsible host, letting their guests get that way.”

As he drives down the road, we find our passage blocked by an overturned recycle can, more conveniently timed evidence to emphasize his point. As Officer Pieniasek gets out to remove the obstacle, I watch the comical scene unfold: an officer of the law cleaning up after full-grown college students. When he returns, we continue discussing the tenuous balance between holding people accountable and protecting constitutional rights.

We ultimately agree to disagree and turn the discussion towards “town and gown” relations, namely between the fraternity houses and their neighbors. I mention the possibility of an “Adopt-a-Family” type program as an attempt to foster communication and build relationships.

“Programs like that have already been tried and they don’t really do anything because they’re doing this all after the problem has existed. They’re doing this after somebody just punched their fence in. They’re doing this after they had a party that can be heard from five blocks away. It’s kind of an empty gesture I think...I think there are positives to it, but the negatives far outweigh what they accomplish.”

The next call is to a frat house on East Hamilton. Officer Pieniazek parks his car on the street where the dilemma becomes immediately apparent. On the right, an orange stone frat house sits across a stretch of open yard where a large cluster of college girls has gathered. To our left, a row of dim houses, the residents no doubt asleep for the evening. From where we stand on the opposite side of the street, the excited conversation of the girls easily drifts past us and towards the darkened residences. Once they spot the police cruiser, however, they scatter into the darkness, and Officer Pieniazek makes his way across the yard and onto the frat’s large portico where he pounds on the double doors.

When the door opens, a wave of sounds carries over us as loud dance-music escapes from the house. He shouts over the music, requesting to see either the fraternity president or vice president. For legal reasons, I agreed not to record Officer Pieniazek and his interactions with any citizens, so I can only paraphrase these exchanges, but one part I do remember explicitly: as the party-goer returned inside to find one of the requested individuals, I could hear a shout: *“The police are here. Prepare to get fucked by the long dick of the law!”* Officer Pieniazek laughs.

As we depart the now-empty fraternity house, a bit of police-jargon crackles out of his radio. That’s when he mentions SIP, a joint effort between the

State College Police Department and the Pennsylvania Liquor Control Board to target those who provide alcohol to those under 21.

“From Thursday on, they occasionally have SIP out – Source Investigation Program – and, basically, what they’re looking for is anything alcohol related and they’ll try turning that into a furnishing. Say it’s a minor that is caught with some alcohol; they’ll try and find out where that alcohol is coming from. So they’re looking for the source.”

He goes on to describe a standard scenario where one officer breaks up a party. Meanwhile, two SIP officers will sit nearby in an unmarked car, watching for fights, vandalism and, of course, open containers.

“They’re not sitting there really to get the people but more-or-less to provide a presence because a lot of times you break up these parties and fights happen as everyone’s trying to leave... And do they get a lot of minors out of it? Yeah. So if you’re doing that program, why not sit outside of a party? You’ll get a good amount of possibilities to investigate furnishings, which is a big problem.” Intrigued by the concept, I ask what happens when they do run into an underage outside of a fraternity.

“You have to do an investigation. What’ll happen is, that person, you’ll ask them if they want to participate and possibly help themselves out. It’s a summary citation and the district attorney likes the fact – it looks good for that person – if they help us out trying to catch who gave them the alcohol. So if that leads to an arrest for the furnishing, a lot of times that summary citation will be dismissed or withdrawn. Is it worth it? Yes. Do a lot of kids do it? I’m going to say its 25% of them do. A lot of them are scared of the frats because there’s retribution or retaliation from the frats. There’s intimidation that goes on.”

As we pass a nearby fraternity, I observe what appears to be a young lady haggling at the door. From a distance, she seems to be going through the familiar ritual of gaining access to the party within. I point the situation out to Officer Pieniazek and ask if he’s familiar with the new policies the Inter-Fraternity Council (IFC) has instituted this semester.

“As far as the security and making sure people belong there and are on the list? I think it’s a sham. I think they’re trying to show that they’re doing [something] – do you see security here right now? I don’t. But even if there is security, do under-21 and do people that aren’t on the list get in?”

I concede that there seems to be a discrepancy between policy and practice. Regardless, I press on, asking if he has noticed any tangible difference between this and previous springs – any decline in alcohol related offenses that might be attributed to the new policies.

“From what the IFC has installed? The only thing I’ve seen that has made a difference somewhat – and this week’s not a good week to look at since it’s Greek Week – the calls have been going down, since we’ve been doing aggressive enforcement.”

At this point we are interrupted to respond to a call for criminal mischief. We arrive to find a young man, handcuffed and leaning on the back of an unmarked police vehicle. A quick update from the on-scene officers reveals that the “perpetrator” was spotted walking down an alley and striking several parked cars. I witness another comical scene as police speak with the young man, with each other, and even with passing students who decide to stop and watch or even participate. Eventually, he is cited with an underage and causing criminal mischief before the officers release him to a (mostly) sober friend.

We return to the cruiser but do not have much more time to talk as we enter what Officer Pieniazek describes as the busiest part of the night:

“Between now [approximately 1:30] and 3:30. After 3 is what everybody refers to as ‘victim hour’ when all of the victims from stuff start arriving at the hospital...”

And he is right. Shortly thereafter, he receives a call for a fifteen-person brawl at 797 Lounge. En route, however, he spots a car driving with no headlights on and stops the vehicle. Before long, the driver is out of his car, failing a field sobriety test and subsequent Breathalyzer tests. From my vantage point, I can see additional officers arriving at 797 and hear radio chatter about a



“weapon.” But it becomes obvious that Officer Pieniazek will have to deliver his new charge to the hospital for a blood test and, eventually, the holding facility in Bellefonte. The time-intensive process ensures that we will miss most of the early-morning excitement.

## APPENDIX II: Questionnaire Responses

*Below are included questionnaire responses from several anonymous Centre County Prevention Coalition members. The questionnaire provides insight into the State College community's perception of Greek Life at The Pennsylvania State University.*

### Questionnaire 1: Community Member Questionnaire Response

#### **What do you feel the community's general perception of Greek Life at Penn State is?**

- I think we are generally dismayed to find (unfortunately, this is usually after we relocate here) that PSU has one of the highest numbers of fraternities in the nation. There is very little positive that I have experienced in relation to Greek Life. Fraternities play a major role in the excessive drinking culture that exists in our community. Through fraternities, teens growing up here have access to parties where alcohol is served and sexual molestation of minors occurs over and over. Even when there seems to be some effort to do something positive, such as volunteering at a community event, fraternity volunteers often can't be counted on to show up.

#### **What expectations does the community have of Greek Life at Penn State? How have these expectations changed, if at all, recently?**

- The stereotypic "frat boy" behavior and mentality is what we observe and, thereby, come to expect. This perception has gotten worse lately, especially with Joe Dado's death and incidents like the fraternity that was recently reported in the CDT that involved disgusting behavior with young pledges being encouraged to drink excessively and dangerously. Students come and go but those of us living here for an extended period of time see these patterns and are deeply concerned about them.

**Do you think that the new rules the Inter Fraternity Council has implemented are, or could be effective in reducing High Risk College Drinking (HRCDD) and its effects? These policies include the elimination of Wednesday socials, heightened party security and guest list procedures, and on certain days limiting the number of guests and types of alcohol permitted at a party.**

- I am encouraged that the IFC has taken these steps! However, when I drive past fraternities and see windows with paper over them so that illegal behaviors can be hidden, the condition of neighborhoods where fraternities are located on weekends (litter, damage, urine, vomit), etc, it makes me wonder if anything will help.

**What steps do you think the IFC, university, or community could take in order to help build a stronger campus/ fraternity/ community relationship? What steps or procedures could help curtail HRCDD and its effects?**

- I think all fraternities that receive more than two citations related to excessive and dangerous drinking should be permanently closed and banned from re-opening in the community. I think we need stronger enforcement, including higher fines, more fines, more parental contact and real consequences (expulsion) for students with summary offences, and fewer “one more chance” measures. If the fraternities that are responsible for the worst behaviors are eliminated, then perhaps there will be a way for other ones to flourish and be integrated in the community in a positive way.

**What perception does the community have of the university as it relates to their oversight of Greek Life at Penn State?**

- I think the university should take a stronger position. I would like to see a strong enforcement policy such that students (whether Greek or not) who are involved in excessive drinking are expelled from the university after one or two incidents.

**Could you describe Greek/community interactions as you have experienced them?**

- I have observed some Greek activities for children which were positive (Halloween, Xmas parties, etc). These have typically involved sororities rather than fraternities. My other observations have been negative and, again, relate to the impact of litter, property damage, urine, vomit, noise violations, home invasions, and foul language that is prevalent in neighborhoods where there are fraternities. In addition, I know of many underage youth who have been admitted to fraternity parties and served alcohol. Unfortunately, several of these have been teenage girls who were then sexually molested and suffered traumatic and lasting damage.

**Are you aware of the Spring Carnival and Greek Sweeps?**

- No, but I would like to learn more about them.

**Do you think that a permanent and regular community/ Greek discussion group would be feasible and positive?**

- I think community members living in neighborhoods where there are fraternities would be interested in this.

**Do you think that community families would be interested in participating in an “adopt a family” program that would match families with Greek organizations for the purpose of heightening interaction between the Greeks and the community?**

- Yes, I think community members would be interested in something like this.

**Any additional comments?**

- Thanks for your interest in addressing this problem which critically impacts everyone living in the area. I hope that students in your group will consider

partnering with Care Partnership: Communities and other community members to prevent and reduce underage and dangerous drinking and make this a better place for all of us to live. Please let us know if any of you are willing to serve on a task force or committees. Again, thanks for being leaders in this effort.

## Questionnaire 2: Community Member Questionnaire Response

**What do you feel the community's general perception of Greek Life at Penn State is?**

- Party-central
- Drinking
- Alumni support

**What expectations does the community have of Greek Life at Penn State? How have these expectations changed, if at all, recently?**

- I don't think the community has expectations of the Greek community at PSU – at least not positive ones.
- I think the community has fewer and fewer expectations of the Greek community over the last 10 years.
- Those who have been part of the community for 10+ years may recall a time of more philanthropy, but this visibility has changed over time.

**Do you think that the new rules the Inter Fraternity Council has implemented are, or could be effective in reducing High Risk College Drinking (HRCDD) and its effects? These policies include the elimination of Wednesday socials, heightened party security and guest list procedures, and on certain days limiting the number of guests and types of alcohol permitted at a party.**

- I think it's a great step in the right direction. I'll be interested if they see a difference in participation, or if the community sees changes in student behaviors.

**What steps do you think the IFC, university, or community could take in order to help build a stronger campus/ fraternity/ community relationship? What steps or procedures could help curtail HRCD and its effects?**

- Keep the no-alcohol policy during rush – perhaps extend it to initiation
- Return to more philanthropic efforts in the community
- I like the donated time to clean up after certain events (ex. State Patty's Day)

**What perception does the community have of the university as it relates to their oversight of Greek Life at Penn State?**

- Minimal involvement

**Could you describe Greek/ community interactions as you have experienced them?**

- I personally haven't lived in State College in 20 years. I only know what I hear about from those who do and from the newspaper. Of course, people don't make it a point to tell me good things – only the problems.

**Are you aware of the Spring Carnival and Greek Sweeps?**

- No

**Do you think that a permanent and regular community/ Greek discussion group would be feasible and positive?**

- Definitely feasible and would be a good step forward

**Do you think that community families would be interested in participating in an "adopt a family" program that would match families with Greek**

**organizations for the purpose of heightening interaction between the Greeks and the community?**

- Families with kids might be reluctant, but if you don't ask, you won't know. Perhaps "adopt a neighborhood" rather than family – would be less intimidating.

**Any additional comments?**

- Good questions – thanks for asking.
- Logistically greek community together

Questionnaire 3: Community Member Questionnaire Response

**What do you feel the community's general perception of Greek Life at Penn State is?**

- I think that people feel that they are privileged and often not held to the same standard as most college students.

**What expectations does the community have of Greek Life at Penn State? How have these expectations changed, if at all, recently?**

- I think people expect the Greek life system to continue to do publicized community giving and fundraising. I think that the expectations on them have increased because of communities' perception of underage drinking and rioting at the university.

**Do you think that the new rules the Inter Fraternity Council has implemented are, or could be effective in reducing High Risk College Drinking (HRCDD) and its effects? These policies include the elimination of Wednesday socials, heightened party security and guest list procedures, and on certain days limiting the number of guests and types of alcohol permitted at a party.**

- I think that anything helps. Unfortunately, limited access just increases the pressure for students (especially) women to portray themselves as even more of a good time to be with so that they get access into parties.
- I think that the limiting of Wednesday specials is also a good idea but I wish that they would make them blanket policies instead of specific night policies.

**Could you describe Greek/community interactions as you have experienced them?**

- I don't have any to this point except for their involvement in the Campus Community Partnership.

**Are you aware of the Spring Carnival and Greek Sweeps?**

- No

**Do you think that a permanent and regular community/Greek discussion group would be feasible and positive?**

- Absolutely

**Do you think that community families would be interested in participating in an "adopt a family" program that would match families with Greek organizations for the purpose of heightening interaction between the Greeks and the community?**

- Not sure. It is probably worth a try.

**Any additional comments?**

- I think that the community has a lack of understanding in reference to Greek life in general so they become more susceptible to stereotyping by the community. Maybe greater publicity across the community for good deeds done would help to boost the community image of Greek life.



- They could also try to publish an article series through the Centre County Prevention Coalition in the Centre Daily Times.
- Community members looking at houses – hot chocolate, lights

#### Questionnaire 4: Community Member Questionnaire Response

##### **What do you feel the community's general perception of Greek Life at Penn State is?**

- The general perception is the fraternities are a large part of the drinking culture, and their parties are attractive to high school students. There is also a perception that unwanted sexual activities, such as date rape and unprotected sex, are also a common occurrence. In addition, the people who attend these parties are responsible for “trashing” surrounding neighborhoods. The community is also aware that student leaders are cooperating in initiatives to change the culture of dangerous drinking.

##### **What expectations does the community have of Greek Life at Penn State? How have these expectations changed, if at all, recently?**

- The community expects the Fraternities to be part of the solution, and the student leaders to work with us. We would like students to understand that community members have watched every year as students die and put themselves in harm's way, knowing that someone's parents are going to receive a phone call that their child is hurt or dead! We want students to be safe in our community, and go on to live healthy, happy lives. We also want them to be responsible members of the community.

**Do you think that the new rules the Inter Fraternity Council has implemented are, or could be effective in reducing High Risk College Drinking (HRCDD) and its effects? These policies include the elimination of Wednesday socials,**

**heightened party security and guest list procedures, and on certain days limiting the number of guests and types of alcohol permitted at a party.**

- Yes, I think they have the potential to be effective if they are implemented with integrity.

**What steps do you think the IFC, university, or community could take in order to help build a stronger campus/fraternity/community relationship? What steps or procedures could help curtail HRCD and its effects?**

- At the March 23 Community Conversation held at the Borough Building, our community saw the following possible solutions. The community needs to help students feel and be a part of the community by establishing opportunities such as: block parties to welcome students in the fall, “adoption” of a dorm or fraternity be community groups, mentoring programs, shared events in the community and on campus, a downtown area for community gatherings (closing Allen Street for example).
- The community and students felt that fines for alcohol related offenses needed to be increased, and current policies should be reviewed, updated and enforced consistently. The consequences should contain a restorative justice component.

**What perception does the community have of the university as it relates to their oversight of Greek Life at Penn State?**

- The perception is the University has limited oversight.

**Could you describe Greek/ community interactions as you have experienced them?**

- I have no direct interaction with the Greek community. My only experience has been through my daughter attending parties as a student.

**Are you aware of the Spring Carnival and Greek Sweeps?**

- No, but I would like to know more.

**Do you think that a permanent and regular community/ Greek discussion group would be feasible and positive?**

- Yes, I think it is possible and something I am willing to help make happen.

**Do you think that community families would be interested in participating in an “adopt a family” program that would match families with Greek organizations for the purpose of heightening interaction between the Greeks and the community?**

- Yes I do.

**Any additional comments?**

- Care Partnership: Centre Region Communities that Care is organizing a taskforce to address underage and dangerous drinking. Our mission is to create a healthy community environment for youth. We would like Penn State student representatives to work with us, and would greatly appreciate any help you can provide to identify students who are willing to serve. Thank you for the opportunity to share my perspective with you. If I can be of any further assistance, please contact me.

Questionnaire 5: Community Member Questionnaire Response

**What do you feel the community's general perception of Greek Life at Penn State is?**

- “A bunch of drunken frat boys”

**What expectations does the community have of Greek Life at Penn State? How have these expectations changed, if at all, recently?**

- I think that many just expect parties, noise, and rowdy behavior. People who have worked with them to raise money for causes realize the positive force they can have.

**Do you think that the new rules the Inter Fraternity Council has implemented are, or could be effective in reducing High Risk College Drinking (HRCDD) and its effects?**

- These policies include the elimination of Wednesday socials, heightened party security and guest list procedures, and on certain days limiting the number of guests and types of alcohol permitted at a party. It's very hopeful.

**What steps do you think the IFC, university, or community could take in order to help build a stronger campus/ fraternity/ community relationship? What steps or procedures could help curtail HRCDD and its effects?**

- Reach out to provide community services at neighborhood levels – Strict penalties for breaking the rules.

**What perception does the community have of the university as it relates to their oversight of Greek Life at Penn State?**

- Things are changing, hopefully for the better for more effective oversight.

**Could you describe Greek/community interactions as you have experienced them?**

- I have had a couple of great experiences with sororities providing coverage for some of my programs. They came about as a surprise response to a general request for help on a few listservs.

**Are you aware of the Spring Carnival and Greek Sweeps?**

- Only vaguely.

**Do you think that a permanent and regular community/ Greek discussion group would be feasible and positive?**

- I think anything is possible!

**Do you think that community families would be interested in participating in an “adopt a family” program that would match families with Greek organizations for the purpose of heightening interaction between the Greeks and the community?**

- Many would.

**Any additional comments?**

- Thanks!

Questionnaire 6: Community Member Questionnaire Response

**What do you feel the community's general perception of Greek Life at Penn State is?**

- I never hear anything positive from anyone about Greek Life.

**What expectations does the community have of Greek Life at Penn State? How have these expectations changed, if at all, recently?**

- We expect them to be responsible and respectful and realize that there are children living around them. We expect them to clean up after themselves and use good language.

**Do you think that the new rules the Inter Fraternity Council has implemented are, or could be effective in reducing High Risk College Drinking (HRCDD) and its effects? These policies include the elimination of Wednesday socials,**

**heightened party security and guest list procedures, and on certain days limiting the number of guests and types of alcohol permitted at a party.**

- Maybe.

**What steps do you think the IFC, university, or community could take in order to help build a stronger campus/fraternity/community relationship? What steps or procedures could help curtail HRCD and its effects?**

- Need to meet each other more and get to know each other. How about a school/community volleyball league or some other sport where they can all get together?

**What perception does the community have of the university as it relates to their oversight of Greek Life at Penn State?**

- Non existent

**Could you describe Greek/ community interactions as you have experienced them?**

- Loud, obnoxious, dirty, directionless, lazy, conceited, clueless

**Are you aware of the Spring Carnival and Greek Sweeps?**

- No.

**Do you think that a permanent and regular community/ Greek discussion group would be feasible and positive?**

- I think a permanent discussion group will start out great and then fizzle out. Need to have a meaningful way to interact to develop a real relationship with each other, such as community projects, sports leagues, etc. You can only sit around and talk so much.

**Do you think that community families would be interested in participating in an “adopt a family” program that would match families with Greek organizations for the purpose of heightening interaction between the Greeks and the community?**

- Yes, and I think that should be an offer for all students to have a surrogate family here in State College.