

# FAQ'S on Open Membership

## **Issue 1: Doesn't the Fraternity currently admit men and women students to membership?**

Yes, the National Bylaws and Membership Policies state that membership in Alpha Phi Omega National Fraternity is open to all students. 344 of the 361 active Chapters are co-ed by practice. However, our practice leading from a 1976 action has allowed Chapters to dictate who can and can not pledge the Fraternity with regard to gender. This practice, sometimes referred to as the "gentlemen's agreement," was set in place so as not to lose Chapters when the Fraternity admitted women. Further the practice allowed Chapters to remain all-male unless the Chapter either decided to admit women or went inactive and was reactivated, at which time the Chapter was required to admit women in its reactivation process. All Chapters currently being chartered must provide opportunities for all students to pledge.

## **Issue 2: Don't Chapters have the right to "choose" their own members?**

This is correct. However the full section of the Bylaws and Membership Policies has to be read to fully understand the meaning. Article III – Membership: "Open Membership. Membership in Alpha Phi Omega shall be open to all students, upon the approval of the respective collegiate Chapter and after fulfilling the Membership requirements prescribed by the National Fraternity and the Chapter." Consistently our Bylaws and Membership Policies refer to all students and do not indicate that females on some campuses may, shall, or can be excluded.

## **Issue 3: Why was this issue and decision not brought to brotherhood at next National Convention?**

It is the responsibility of the National Board of Directors, legally, ethically, and through the stated role of the Board as described in the Fraternity's Bylaws, to ensure the Fraternity operates in full compliance with its Bylaws. Currently by practice the Fraternity denies membership to women on 17 campuses that are co-ed. It has been determined that this practice is inconsistent with our National Bylaws and Membership Policies as approved by past National Conventions.

## **Issue 4: Why the change in interpretation and precedent/tradition?**

The issue of being fully representative of the campus population on each of the campuses where the Fraternity has Chapters was identified by the Board of Directors in February 2005 at a strategic planning meeting as a potential roadblock in long-term success of the Fraternity. This observation and subsequent conversation led to investigating how to transition to be fully inclusive and truly open to all students. The first step was to open our membership to women on the 17 all-male Chapters. The National Vice President began this process by discussing this issue with various alumni across the nation to gain their insight. During this process the National President asked for advice from Legal Counsel. Legal Counsel provided his opinion that the current membership practices are inconsistent with the National Bylaws. At the July 2005 meeting of the

Board of Directors the report of the National Vice President and the opinion of the National Legal Counsel were reviewed. The Board considered this issue for more than five hours, three hours in informal discussion (not an executive session) followed by a two-hour discussion in open session during the Board meeting. The result was a resolution, unanimously passed by the Board of Directors, calling for action to be taken. It was clear from discussion and from Legal Counsel's opinion that inconsistencies should not be sanctioned and that corrective action was necessary.

**Issue 5: Women have a place to serve on campus so it's not like we are taking an opportunity away from them. (Gamma Sigma Sigma, Circle K)**

While it is true that there are numerous opportunities for service on college campuses today, this issue and action are not about other organizations. Alpha Phi Omega must be true to its own Bylaws and Policies. Though other service organizations exist on many – if not all – of the campuses where we have Chapters, Alpha Phi Omega offers a unique blend of Leadership, Friendship, and Service that makes the Fraternity different and distinctive from other community service organizations.

**Issue 6: The Board is going against the wishes of the Fraternity not to eliminate all-male Chapters and as affirmed during past conventions.**

The Convention is the Supreme Authority of the Fraternity. However, it cannot adopt something that is inconsistent with the Bylaws or against the law. Such an action, even if adopted, may be deemed null and void if it is found to violate those documents (that is a standard tenet of Roberts Rules of Order, Newly Revised, which our Bylaws designate as the parliamentary authority for the National Convention). Thus is the case with this issue and decision.

**Issue 7: There have been multiple interpretations and legal opinions regarding this issue; why make a hasty decision based solely on the National Legal Counsel's opinion?**

This was not a hasty decision on the part of the members of the Board of Directors. Further, the Legal Counsel's opinion was provided AFTER the Board had already decided to investigate the question of Open Membership to determine how best to go about making Alpha Phi Omega more inclusive and truly open to all students. Our Legal Counsel is appointed by the National President and approved by the National Board of Directors to provide legal advice. He is designated as the official on the Board for these types of opinions, and therefore our Board has a responsibility to listen carefully to his opinions and to act as appropriate on those opinions. The Fraternity's Legal Counsel is a respected and accomplished attorney in the State of Missouri who generously donates his time and professional resources to provide the Fraternity with sound and thoughtful legal advice. All Brothers can have full confidence that the opinions he gives the Fraternity are appropriately researched and well-grounded.

**Issue 8: There will be a loss of the sense of brotherhood and the special bond that currently exists within the all-male Chapters.**

There is no denying that the sense of brotherhood will change within the 17 all-male Chapters. However, to say brotherhood will be lost is to say the vast majority of the Fraternity's

remaining 344 Chapters that are co-ed do not have a sense of brotherhood or maintain a special bond.

**Issue 9: What did the all-male Chapters do to deserve this? How is their commitment to our service program not a shining example of LF&S?**

The active and alumni Brothers of the Fraternity from all-male Chapters have done nothing wrong. They followed an accepted practice. It is that practice that is now in question. The 17 Chapters that are currently all-male have provided a program of Leadership, Friendship and Service on their respective campuses for many years. For this commitment and dedication, all Brothers of Alpha Phi Omega should be proud and should recognize these achievements. Building on that foundation, Open Membership can make these Chapters even stronger by increasing their potential membership, by giving all students on those campuses the opportunity to experience what the Fraternity has to offer, and by increasing the types and amount of service provided to the campus, community, Nation, and Fraternity.

**Issue 10: Why has the Board made this decision to change decades of precedent and interpretation without student input?**

It is the responsibility of the duly elected Board of Directors to work for the best interests of the Fraternity. This responsibility is both a legal and an ethical obligation. The members of the Board were faced with

- 1) concern for the long-term future of the Fraternity,
- 2) a prevailing sense that not fully opening our membership to all students is wrong, and
- 3) correcting the inconsistencies between our practice and our Bylaws.

Thus action was taken with consideration of the entire Brotherhood of the Fraternity, with knowledge of the arguments surrounding this issue, and with the commitment that student input would be part of the transition process.

**Issue 11: Our Chapter is co-educational currently; why should we care about this issue?**

There are many reasons for interest in or concern about this issue. One, currently there are all-male Chapters within our Brotherhood that do not recognize, either fully or in part, female Brothers who wish to transfer into the Chapter. Two, the Fraternity's Membership Policy should be applied consistently to and by all Brothers and Chapters of the Fraternity. Three, this issue has been raised in one way or another at every National Convention for the past 30 years. For any issue to be raised again and again over such a long period of time suggests it is a problem for the organization. Four, over the years college administrators and potential members have questioned this practice, and as a result, the Fraternity's ability to grow has been negatively affected.