

INTOUCH

with Fraternities and Sororities

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Century-old greek organizations are alive and kicking

"If you are being rushed by a fraternity, do not let it cause you to go down town and purchase a bigger hat."

— from the University's Student "Hello" Book 1977

University forefathers probably didn't realize advice such as this would still be applicable to students of the 1990s. The specifics may change with the times—it's doubtful people run out and buy new hats to celebrate rush—but many of the sentiments and philosophies of the early days remain alive today.

In 1901, the University established Sigma Nu fraternity as the first greek organization to exist on campus. Other fraternities quickly followed, with membership at around 15 people in each house. The first sorority on campus, Gamma Phi Beta, received its charter in 1908.

Although many traditions and rituals of the early days are upheld by modern greeks, it seems that the exclusiveness and supreme secrecy of the groups was taken much more seriously in the beginning. In the 1914 edition of the University's *Student Handbook*, the incoming freshman is advised that "if the fraternities desire your fellowship they will ask you. Until then, the details of their activities need not be of any interest to you and the less you ask about them or comment upon them, as a newcomer, the wiser you are."

According to the 1916 *Student Handbook*, every student in the greek system was assigned to an upperclassman in his or her organization. The upperclassman was "direct-



Members of the first sorority on campus, Gamma Phi Beta, pose on the steps of their house in 1908.

ly responsible to the fraternity for the scholastic standing of his roommate and his success in school activities," for the first two years of the student's college career. In addition, no freshman was allowed to leave the fraternity or sorority house on a school night "without special permission from an officer of the fraternity," according to the publication.

As the University expanded over the years, the greek system also enjoyed healthy growth. University senior Sue Bright, who first attended school here in the early 1940s, said greek affiliation was tremendously widespread during her day as a sorority member.

"When I moved to Eugene, I real-

ized that every girl in high school was focused on going to college just for sorority life," Bright said. "Very few of them thought in terms of careers; they went to school to find someone to marry."

Bright, who was a member of Gamma Phi Beta, said she felt a deep sense of sisterhood with the rest of the sorority members, because there were only about 45 members and all were required to live in the house.

"We were also required to participate in many social and school activities, but it was easier to do that because school was a breeze back then," she said. "We had a lot of California girls in my sorority because they couldn't get into the Cali-

fornia (school) system.

"Oregon was a country club back then," Bright added. "We had plenty of time to do 'Mickey Mouse' things."

Bright didn't graduate during those "Mickey Mouse" days, because she left school to join the Navy at the beginning of World War I. After getting married, raising a family and getting divorced, she said she finally found time to get back to the University to finish her degree requirements.

Bright said she knows of two women who were sorority members at the University during its inception on campus.

"They still talk about those days," Bright said. "They've gone through life being old sorority girls."

The popularity of greek organizations continued to grow at a regular rate until it reached a peak in the early 1960s, when there were 22 fraternities and 16 sororities on campus.

In the late 1960s, however, membership in the greek system dropped dramatically, causing 14 houses to close in the period of six years. By the fall of 1970, only six percent of the student body was involved in the greek system. The rising anti-establishment mood and social changes during the Viet Nam era contributed to the decline in greek popularity. Also, racial discrimination clauses in house charters added to the slump in membership, according to an Oct. 31, 1971 article in the *Register-Guard*.

Since that period of decline, the

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GREEK LIFE

NOW YOU'RE GOING PLACES

| | yes | no |
|--|--|--|
| * ARE YOU UNDER 21? | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| * ARE YOU HUNGRY? | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| * DO YOU LIKE ITALIAN FOOD? | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| * DO YOU LIKE AMERICAN FOOD? | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| THEN COME TO | | |
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