

Minority students offer mixed views on greek life

Few minorities choose to pledge a fraternity or sorority, but greeks are working to change that

By Jay-E Shih
Freelance Reporter

Minority students at the University report mixed experiences within the greek system.

According to the 1996-97 University of Oregon Greek Ethnic Membership Report, minority students who classify themselves as Asian-Pacific, African-American, Hispanic, Latino, Native American or another ethnicity make up less than 13 percent of greeks at the University.

"In general, most of the greeks on this campus are white because there are not large groups of minorities here," said Eryn Schroeder, University Panhellenic tribunal and judicial chair. "Less than 1,800 students choose to be a part of the greek system."

ASUO Greek Life Advocate Nate Koach of Phi Kappa Psi said there is a group called COLORS in the greek system that deals with multicultural issues and problems, but this group has not been very active in the past two years. He also said greeks in the past haven't been very aggressive in recruiting more minority students; however, Koach's plan for this

year is to have greeks reach out to multicultural groups on campus to add more minority students.

Kerri Lookabaugh of Kappa Delta, a former chair of COLORS, said the group was started in 1991 by chapter members of University sororities and fraternities. She said the group did not seem very active last year because they had a late start. This year they hope to have more activities to promote diversity in the greek system.

Some minority students who have gone through rush said their goal was to contribute their efforts to the greek system. They also expressed their views about the positives and negatives of greek life.

"I decided not to join a sorority because I didn't get in the top four houses of my choice," said Serena Markstrom, who is half black and half white. "I was very disappointed with the [greek] system."

"I could not get any feedback why I didn't get to be chosen for those houses. I was the homecoming queen at my high school. I had great leadership skills and a lot of community service experience."

Markstrom said while sorority members are often stereotyped as upper-middle and upper class white females, she didn't believe the stereotype.

"I wanted to change that image," she said. "The stereotype was always a myth to me, but now,

I really don't know."

Geneva Wortman, a Native American, has been in the greek system since her freshman year.

"Living with more than 90 other women in a greek house, it felt like being in my own culture," she said. "I really enjoyed it, especially in my freshman year. I honestly didn't know how I would make it through without these women's help."

She said greek life has been a positive experience for her because of the true friendship and social life she experienced while "living with these bright women." She said there will always be someone to hold her hand and comfort her when she comes back to the house feeling tired and down.

However, Wortman said there are also negative aspects.

"The minus of the greek system is that these students have the tendency to be more politically conservative because most of them grew up in wealthier families," she said.

"Because I visit my relatives who still live on a reservation every summer, I've seen the poverty. Sometimes I get frustrated because [greeks] don't understand the world outside the greek circle, and they don't have a very well-rounded perspective."

Wortman said she never felt that anyone in her chapter treated her differently because of her race.

Another minority student in the greek system is University track runner Howard Moore, who is African-American and Japanese.

He said he joined Phi Kappa Psi because he likes the brotherhood, closeness and social aspects of the fraternity.

Moore said greek life promotes the understanding of different people, encourages members to tolerate all kinds of personalities and helps students to be more disciplined and organized. He said the bonding and companionship between brothers is also a bonus.

"The negative side of it would be too much partying because I am taking 18 credits and running track," he said. "Time constraint is also another minus for me. Fraternities are very demanding on their members. I only can do so much, and sometimes it really gets in the way."

Being a minority in the greek system does not bother Moore; he said he has never encountered any racism.

Besides joining the official University greek system, minority students can take part in greek life by joining one of the eight African-American sororities or fraternities on campus.

Roland Hayes, who is black, joined Kappa Alpha Phi, an African-American fraternity, in 1994.

"The reason I joined the frater-

nity is that being a member of the black community I want to give back to the community," said Hayes, a senior who is pursuing his second bachelor's degree in journalism. "We chose not to be in the greek system on campus because their government standards are different. We have our own guidelines."

According to Shelley Sutherland, assistant director and greek advisor, the African-American fraternities do not have houses because they do not have enough members — each chapter currently has less than 10.

Sutherland said although these fraternities are not part of the official University greek system, their chapters are directly linked to the Panhellenic Council at the national level. As undergraduate students, the members are often more active outside the campus and involved in community service.

"A lot of people don't even realize that black fraternities existed," Hayes said. "I had people ask me when my chapter was established. I told them that the chapter started back in early 1900s. People were amazed."

Hayes said Kappa Alpha Phi includes other minorities and whites as well as African-Americans.

"We are not exclusive. We welcome all people to join our chapters," Hayes said.

Directory: Many students are unaware of the process

Continued from Page 1

personal information is an option.

Goade, who is new to the University, said he was unaware of the specific steps.

"It's obviously a lack of education on the administration's part," ASUO President Bill Miner said. "I do think, however, that if the administration thinks it's a concern, they'll provide safety for the students."

Goade labeled it as a safety issue, and said the directory could act as an aid for stalkers.

"Our privacy — what little we do have — we need to protect," he said.

Miner echoed Goade's concerns.

"Obviously if students are afraid that their personal information can affect their attendance at the UO, it's a problem," Miner said.

According to the statement in the Schedule of Classes, the directory information can include students' names, local and permanent addresses, telephone numbers, class and level type, academic major, dates of attendance, total credit hours, degrees and certificates awarded, honors awarded and participation in officially recognized activities.

In order for that information to

remain confidential, students must file a Restriction of Directory Information. The request will go into effect in, at the very least, two working days after it is requested. It is permanent until the student requests in writing to have the restriction removed.

In order for the information to not be published in the Student Directory, students must fill out the request in the first week of fall term.

While students can obtain their own personal information after they have presented a photo identification, their information cannot be released to anyone else unless students have written an

authorization to do so, according to the statement.

For students like Goade, all that the registrar's office can do is restrict further information from being released, but it cannot do anything about what was already printed in the directory, Chereck said.

"That's an individual choice [to restrict information]," he said. "I don't need to know why they want to do it; that's not important to me. I'm just concerned that they know the process, and some situations are really important to individuals, and we need to help them the best that we can."

ET ALS

MISCELLANEOUS

The Multicultural Center is sponsoring a Women of Color pizza party and movie at 6 p.m. in the ASUO Women's Center. For more information, call 346-4095.

Academic Advising and Student Services is holding a workshop on applying to social work programs at 3:30 p.m. in the EMU Gumwood Room. For more information, call 346-3211.

The College Democrats have invited Oregon Democratic Party Chair Marc Abrams to speak at 7 p.m. in 107 Esslinger. For more information, call Sari Wisch at 338-7814.

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