

STANFORD UNIVERSITY
STANFORD, CALIFORNIA

Info

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UNIVERSITY RELATIONS



December 8, 1965

President Arthur S. Flemmin
University of Oregon
Eugene, Oregon

Dear President Flemmin:

More than six months have elapsed since our last communication with you regarding the suspension of the Stanford chapter of Sigma Chi by the national fraternity. Since then several universities have written asking for up-to-date information on the status of the Stanford chapter and any recent developments in this case.

The following is an attempt to cover the major developments as accurately and as concisely as possible. Additional information will be provided later if we feel it might be helpful to individual institutions.

At the outset, it should be made clear that this letter is sent as a matter of information from the University and does not involve the chapter in any way. In its order suspending the Stanford chapter, the national warned the local against "any further publicity," and the chapter is earnestly trying to abide by this restriction.

The major actions in which you will be interested are as follows:

1. At its national convention in Denver June 19, Sigma Chi voted to continue the suspension of its Stanford chapter by a 3 to 1 margin.

In brief, national officers of the fraternity stated that the action resulted from "disregard of and active opposition to rituals." The national's position is given in the enclosed statement from the Magazine of Sigma Chi.

At the time of the Denver action, Frank Olrich, spokesman for the Stanford student chapter said:

"We have felt and always will feel that, in our opinion, the suspension was based on the discrimination question. However, we sincerely feel that definite steps are being made to eliminate racial barriers in our fraternity and that this problem can be solved within the framework of the national fraternity.

"We intend to fulfill our obligation to the national fraternity by complying with that part of the ritual which we have neglected in the past. However, we do not intend to compromise our moral position on the question of racial discrimination."

Besides sustaining the Stanford suspension, the Sigma Chi convention defeated two proposals to give local chapters greater autonomy in membership selection. The national also created a committee on college relations to study problems raised at the convention.

In addition to criticising the Stanford chapter for its failure to observe ritual, the national has now required the chapter to return its copy of the ritual and related material, has questioned the propriety of using its pledge manual (a nonsecret document) in chapter training, and has warned the chapter, as noted, against any further publicity in the case. The chapter has made every effort to abide by these stipulations in good faith.

2. Since the national convention, several universities have reviewed the status of Sigma Chi chapters on their campuses. Among these have been the Universities of Oregon, Wisconsin, and Michigan, which have announced their intention of investigating possible de facto segregation in the national, mainly because of the Stanford chapter's suspension.

On Sept. 15, the University of Colorado regents refused to lift the probationary status imposed on Sigma Chi May 29, despite a notice from the chapter to the national that "we will be autonomous in the selection of members immediately and will not submit to the international fraternity our choice of members."

On October 25, Brown University directed its Sigma Chi chapter to sever its ties with the national by January 29, 1966 because of the so-called "social acceptability" clause. Brown President Barnaby Keeney is a Sigma Chi.

3. On June 17, 1965, Senator Lee Metcalf of Montana, a Stanford chapter alumnus, released a letter from U. S. Commissioner of Education Francis Keppel, pointing out that Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and regulations issued by the Department of Health, Education and Welfare "make it apparent that an institution which maintains a fraternity system as a part of its activities and overall program is responsible under the Civil Rights Act requirement for assuring that discrimination is not practiced by fraternities in the system."

Subsequently, the U. S. Office of Education noted that any question of fraternity discrimination would have to arise through an individual complaint. This would be followed by an examination 1) of the individual fraternity's precise role on campus, 2) whether or not it was, in fact, discriminating, and 3) what the college planned as corrective measures if discrimination did exist. To date, no complaint has been filed.

4. In response to the Commissioner's letter, the House added an amendment to the Higher Education Act of 1965 specifically exempting college fraternities from the provisions of Title VI. This was challenged in the Senate when it was pointed out that some colleges are using federal loans to help finance construction of new fraternity houses. The issue went to a Senate-House Conference Committee and as signed by the President, the Higher Education Act of 1965, included this compromise amendment:

"...nothing contained in this act or any other act shall be construed to authorize any department, agency, officer, or employee of the United States to exercise any direction, supervision, or control over the membership practices or internal operations of any fraternal organization, fraternity, sorority, private club or religious organization at an institution of higher education (other than a service academy or the Coast Guard Academy) which is financed exclusively by funds derived from private sources and whose facilities are not owned by such institution."

It is pertinent to note here that the National Interfraternity Council estimates that approximately three-fourths of the local chapters of its member institutions are privately owned. Other data have shown that colleges own all or part of the fraternities on about half the campuses with fraternity systems.

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5. National officers of Sigma Chi have repeatedly raised several questions about the exact sequence of events surrounding the pledging of a Negro by the Stanford chapter last April. You may therefore be reassured to know that former National President Harry V. Wade was sent a copy of our April 29 letter to you, has confirmed that the quotes attributed to him were correct, and has raised no question concerning the factual accuracy of this account with the University.

In addition to these facts, it is appropriate to note that on three separate occasions--February 12 in San Francisco, March 28 in Denver, and April 1 at Stanford--various national and regional officers of Sigma Chi questioned chapter members, alumni, and University representatives about the prospective pledging of a Negro. Little or no mention was made of failure to adhere to fraternity ritual.

At the Denver convention, the Stanford chapter was represented by eight students, two attorneys and a faculty associate, all of whom are Sigma Chis.

The only extensive questioning of the Stanford chapter's observance of ritual and other practices criticized by the national came at a closed hearing June 17. This resulted in a recommendation to the convention that the National Executive Committee's suspension of the chapter be sustained.

This hearing came two and a half months after the summary suspension of the Stanford chapter. In at least 15 other cases during the previous year, chapters received a "show cause" notice specifying the national's complaint and setting a deadline for compliance. The Stanford chapter received no such notice; its suspension took effect immediately.

6. To date, the national has given no indication of what action, if any, it will take when the one-year suspension imposed by its executive committee ends in early April 1966.

In summary, while the national now has dropped its provision that photographs of pledges be submitted with their application, two key factors in the Stanford case remain unchanged:

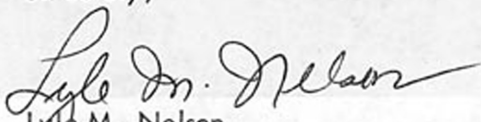
1. The fraternity still has a so-called social acceptability clause, which says that local chapters should "refrain from proposing for membership to our fellowship any person who for any reason is likely to be considered personally unacceptable as a brother by any chapter or any member anywhere."
2. The national still has a membership committee. To quote the July 1965 issue of the Magazine of Sigma Chi: "The sole power to pledge is in the active chapters...Once chosen, the pledge's future initiation is subject only to the individual conclusions of the members of the active chapter and the individual conclusions of some 60 members of the Grand Council" (any one of whom may block the chapter's choice).

These are the major developments which bring you up-to-date with respect to the Stanford Sigma Chi issue. You will also be interested to know that both the chapter and the fraternity system at Stanford continue to demonstrate their strength. Over the past three years, the number of fraternity pledges at Stanford has increased from 400 to 497 (with no corresponding increase in the freshman class of approximately 850 men); the University has invested several million dollars in eight new fraternity buildings with plans for five more well advanced; and continued efforts are being made to integrate fraternities and other undergraduate living units into the educational program of the University.

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As for the local chapter, its 27-man pledge class is regarded as one of the best in recent years. Alumni support is strong--and growing. And the chapter has maintained its high position in scholarship, athletics, and extracurricular activities at Stanford. All of us familiar with the Stanford chapter remain firmly convinced of the students' sincerity of purpose, loyalty to the national fraternity, and sense of responsibility. They fully merit and will continue to receive the support of Stanford in this controversy.

Sincerely,



Lyle M. Nelson
Director, University Relations

enclosure