



GREEK LIFE
STUDENT AFFAIRS

Town Hall
Listening Sessions
Spring 2021

Dear Auburn Fraternity and Sorority Community,

This spring I was named Associate Vice President for Student Affairs with the responsibility of supervising Greek Life at Auburn University. To learn more about the current experience of Auburn students, advisors, parents, and alumni, I held over two dozen listening sessions. These conversations provided insight into areas of pride as well as areas for improvement within our community.

The following pages outline the information I gathered from this experience. While I heard from a broad range of people with a wide variety of experiences, the information included in this report was consistent. The themes outlined in this report were frequently heard across constituency groups.

While pride in the Greek community was a consistent theme in many conversations, the pressing topics that all groups mentioned regularly were student leadership, facility challenges, campus policies, diversity, and perceptions of Greek Life on campus. The effects of COVID-19 were discussed occasionally, however, most participants focused on long-term challenges facing Greek Life.

The Greek Life team and I have already begun to work on the concerns outlined in this report. This fall we want you to see a cohesive Greek Life marketing presence, updated policies that are easy to understand, and more resources to support your chapters. If there are other ideas you have about how we can improve Greek Life at Auburn, please contact me at (334) 844-1304 or at lady@auburn.edu.

Thank you for supporting the Auburn University fraternity and sorority community!

Warmly,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lady Cox". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Lady Cox
Associate Vice President for Student Affairs

Feedback about the Greek Life experience at Auburn from students, parents, alumni, and headquarters was mostly positive. Many highlighted recent awards or accomplishments that chapters or councils won as evidence of high-quality programs on campus. Many also described ease when working with the staff in the office. Most conversations focused on areas of potential improvement for Greek Life that the community would like to see.

The five themes that emerged through these conversations were:

- Student leadership
- Facilities
- Policies and procedures
- Diversity, equity, and inclusion
- Marketing and communication

STUDENT LEADERSHIP

One of the cornerstones of the Auburn experience is student governance. Several students described how important it is to ensure that students are the central leaders of these organizations. Students want to maintain student self-governance and trust within the institution. They also expressed, however, a need for additional support to ensure they are effectively leading their chapters. Students shared they want Greek Life to provide guidelines and support and then allow the chapters to execute the programs.

Mental health is a top concern of many student leaders, and several discussed how COVID-19 has amplified the need for additional resources in the chapters. One fraternity president described how the inability to have social, philanthropic, and intramural events on campus led members to feel isolated and disconnected from each other. Recent suicides within the IFC community also weighed heavily on presidents who shared they did not know how best to support members struggling with mental health challenges.

Service and philanthropy were other areas where students and advisors described a lack of resources. Students described how the focus of much of the training for Greek leaders was around parties and social event policies. They requested additional information about how to host philanthropic events or conduct service projects in the community, describing how daunting it felt to try to plan these events because of limited information.

Advisors shared a need for greater communication and a shared Greek calendar of events to help prevent similar events from happening at the same time. They also expressed a need for additional resources to prepare Greek members for leadership roles. They described that when student leaders are faced with a specific issue, they are not aware of what resources are available to address the problem. Advisors requested that Greek Life implement training so that the entire burden did not fall to chapters to develop and create the programming and education.

POLICIES and PROCEDURES

Policies were the topic discussed most by students. Specifically, students from every council discussed how policies were not consistent for all councils and that groups were treated differently. Students from all councils shared a perception that the rules for their council were the most restrictive and that they were punished more frequently and harshly. One student shared that the difference of activities and permissiveness from each council is challenging when trying to create a shared, positive Greek experience.

Students consistently requested that Greek Life policies and procedures be clearly communicated to all councils and chapters. Many students also expressed concern about the Auburn University Social Event policy and how it was adjudicated on campus. Some shared that the policy resulted in chapters being reprimanded for the behavior of a small number of members in situations that were not controlled by the chapter. Student leaders expressed they frequently felt their organizations were under attack for actions made by single individuals.

DIVERSITY, EQUITY, and INCLUSION

Auburn students frequently discussed the importance of diversity, equity, and inclusion on campus and in Greek Life. Conversations with students revolved around the need to create a community of care that was welcoming to all students, particularly non-white students, and transfer students. Council and chapter leaders talked about steps their groups were taking to create more inclusive environments. They shared how they valued diversity in Greek Life experiences noting that not everyone wants a big chapter, and that more students are now focusing on which council experience they want to join, in addition to which chapter.

The most consistent area of concern for students is the decreasing number of Black students and low numbers of non-white students attending Auburn. Students talked about the need to have more Black students on campus to create a thriving NPHC community and a diverse Greek community. Students discussed a desire to have all nine NPHC organizations on campus but stressed that there needed to be more Black students on campus to grow. Similarly, students acknowledged the need for a larger population of students identifying as non-white to grow the participation numbers of the MGC and its chapters.

Students also shared they were having conversations around gender and how non-binary students would participate in their organizations. While students were supportive of creating community for trans and non-binary students, they do want to have single-gender organizations on campus. In particular, sorority women described a need for spaces on campus where they could discuss issues with other women.

FACILITIES

Facilities were discussed at length by students and chapter advisors as challenges. Members from each council described unique frustrations with their current facilities, but all were unified in expressing a need for accessible, affordable space for students to meet and engage with each other. It was consistently stated that Auburn University did not have sufficient meeting space to support the needs of students for weekly chapter meetings or informal gatherings.

IFC Facilities - When discussing the management of fraternity housing on campus, fraternity members and advisors expressed frustration. Several members described insufficient support around house management which has affected their ability to maintain their properties. Students described unclear policies and processes that frequently made them feel at odds with campus staff. It also appeared that, for many chapters, the students are responsible for all oversight of the properties, rather than a fraternity house corporation. Students described being unprepared to manage contract negotiations, evictions, and remodeling projects that were presented to them. Advisors also expressed a desire for additional support and clear communication about how to manage the facilities. Students and advisors were unified that they valued the affordability of living in and eating at the fraternity houses.

NPHC Facilities – There is support and excitement for the construction of the NPHC Legacy Plaza from Greek community members from all councils. The NPHC Legacy Plaza was a Tiger Giving Day project in Spring 2021, and many individuals, groups, and chapters from all councils financially contributed to the project. Advisors and alumni stressed that the NPHC Legacy Plaza should be a place where members and alumni can host events throughout the year and connect on game days.

Panhellenic Facilities - The students and advisors for Panhellenic sororities described the challenges of the Village Residence Hall chapter rooms including the lack of space, the need for parking, and the high living expenses. Currently the 18 chapters are using all 18 chapter rooms with an average membership of 290 (at its highest), when the average fire code capacity for the chapter rooms is 273. Some expressed a concern that as interest in Panhellenic membership grows, there is not a way to manage growth. For example, there is not a vacant chapter room for a new sorority to colonize, which could potentially help keep membership totals from growing too rapidly across chapters. Current members also expressed a desire for space for students to have social engagement and support, not just bed spaces. They also said that the lack of parking near the Village discouraged off-campus members from participating in campus events. Some advisors also discussed the challenge of filling the Village Residence Hall beds with members, as the cost to live on campus is higher than many members pay for off-campus living arrangements. All agreed that the affordability of Panhellenic membership at Auburn was a benefit and they wanted to continue ensuring that the community is financially accessible.

Note: Meeting spaces for NPHC and MGC did not arise in conversations.

MARKETING and COMMUNICATION

There is an urgent need to tell the story of Greek Life at Auburn according to many students and advisors. Many spoke at length about the good work happening in their chapters and councils that was not recognized across campus. There was a concern that the larger Auburn community does not see Greek Life as an asset and a benefit to the campus. Some also shared a fear of the negative national narrative about fraternities and sororities; they wanted Auburn Greek Life to share the positive experience happening on campus.

Auburn's Greek students earn higher grade point averages compared to non-Greek peers, and they want their academic accomplishments to be shared. They also asked that there be greater attention on the service and philanthropy they do in the local Auburn community. Advisors recommended highlighting current student leaders and alumni members that are making an impact in their respective areas.

Advisors, headquarters staff, and parents also requested more information about how Auburn University and Greek Life support current students. They requested information about what is happening on campus (enrollment trends, new programs, etc.) and also information about resources for students (e.g. mental health, suicide prevention, alcohol education, etc.) so that they can best support their members. Advisors especially stressed that they were not getting enough information to fully support their chapters.