

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING
GREEK ALUMNI COUNCIL
MIDDLE TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY
9:30 a.m.-11:45 a.m.
Saturday, Sept. 14, 2014
Ingram Conference Center**

Council members attending: Curtis Settle, Alpha Phi Alpha; Kim Godwin, Delta Zeta; James Mason, Alpha Phi Alpha; Gerald Lee Hill, Pi Kappa Alpha; Charles Wilson, Omega Psi Phi; Lindsay Moreland; Zeta Tau Alpha; Alicia Barnes, Alpha Omicron Pi; Scott Hogue, Pi Kappa Alpha; Tom Cribbs, Sigma Chi; Pam Keach, Kappa Delta; Paula Mansfield, Chi Omega; Ty Beth, Delta Sigma Theta; Randy Crawley Jr., Omega Psi Phi; Tony Beard, Alpha Phi Alpha; Tim Strobl, Sigma Alpha Epsilon and GAC president

University administrators attending: President Sidney A. McPhee; Deb Sells, vice president for student affairs; Andrew Oppmann, vice president for marketing and communications; Joe Bales, vice president for university administration; Kimberly Edgar, executive assistant to the president; Ginger Freeman, director of alumni relations; Allison Commings, director of fraternity and sorority life

President McPhee's welcome

Thank you for your willingness to participate on this panel and to lend your time and talents to the benefit of your alma mater.

I recognize and appreciate also the passion you are putting forward in this effort – not only today, but in your weekly conference calls and the ongoing dialogue found on your Facebook page.

I'm not here to lecture you; I'm not here to make excuses. I called you here, as the president of this university, to hear your concerns and determine how we will address them together. If we can't reach that stage, we are wasting our time.

I don't want this to be a meeting where we spend hours and hours identifying the problems we all knew about. The question is how are we going to move forward and who are we going to hold accountable for moving forward.

If everyone is accountable, no one is. We are going to hold you accountable for helping us move forward and coming back on a regular basis. We will determine who is responsible from our end and how they are doing.

Excited that we have such talented individuals that have made an investment in our growth and future. I want to take advantage of that energy and talent. Not interested in bogging down and re-visiting history; my goal is to move quickly to the most important part of this conversation: How we get to where we need to be.

I believe that the Greek experience is a very important part of the college experience:

- I am Greek;
- My wife is Greek;
- My daughter and son are Greek

If you talk to our undergraduates at all levels, it's not just rhetoric that the president is a Greek: I attend their events and I am involved, just as I am involved in athletics and our cultural events.

I also want to state for the record that I believe that Greek life is an integral part of college life at MTSU.

I am committed to keeping and maintaining a strong Greek community that can serve as a role model for service, scholarship and student success.

As I relayed to Paula recently, I have been concerned about the future of Greek life on our campus.

I share many of your concerns; I also have other concerns that I hope this group can help me resolve.

I will also tell you that I have had numerous conversations with our staff on some of the missteps over the last several years on getting us where we need to be.

I want you to know that I recognize as president that some of the challenges we have experienced as president during my tenure the reasons lie at the step of the university – and I take the responsibility for that.

We have made efforts to fix unacceptable turnover in the administration of our Greek programs. Turnover leads to a lack of direction and cohesiveness in management that can lead to more problems.

There needs to be continual improvement in our Greek life. It must focus upon the future, not live in the past.

And, in order to be truly successful, it must also be in step with the changing needs and priorities of our students.

In the days when I pledged, before the days before Twitter and Facebook, I'm glad social media wasn't around. The environment has changed as to what the institution knows and how it responds.

Our university has a fiduciary responsibility to any organization that we sanction.

And these organizations must be held to high ethical, legal and moral standards to ensure their principles and practices are in alignment with the university.

We are not the only university struggling with these issues. If you keep up with activities of Greeks around the country, you will find that universities everywhere have to hold groups on campus responsible for their actions, whether it is Greek life or any other organization.

Dr. Sells will provide you with statistics showing the current health and status of our Greek population. You will see that our numbers, while stable now, are down from a decade ago.

So, my charge to you:

- How can a more engaged and active Greek alumni group be mentors to create a model system of fraternities and sororities on our campus?
- How can a more engaged and active Greek alumni group be a conduit for accurate information from the university to the alumni base, so that we can dispel rumors and deal with facts?
- How can we grow our Greek population so that it becomes an even stronger part of our student recruitment and retention efforts?
- And how can our Greek chapters become and remain financially solvent and stable?

I want, and need, your ideas. And I want you to consider yourself as chartered and sanctioned by me – and directly reporting to me.

However, I want you to recognize that as an advisory board, cannot replace or join any disciplinary, contractual or membership issues for the chapters.

- That is reserved for the housing corporations, chapter and alumni leadership officers and boards, the student IFC and PanHellenic groups and the national corporate organizations.
- This is for your legal protection, as you are not a corporation, have no assets and do not need to be held liable or accountable for the actions we may need to take as an administration.
- This is also the right thing to do: These groups I mentioned are the owners, officers and entities that control and population these organizations.

However, I do very much want you to be engaged.

That means I want you to ask questions, seek information and, most important, give me ideas, observations and suggestions. Your insights will help me do a better job.

Finally, I need you to have “skin in the game.”

It is easy to find problems; I want you to bring forward solutions.

I want today to be the beginning of the next, greater step of your involvement with our university.

Mr. Strobl’s welcome:

Why we are all here, if nothing else, is because participating in a fraternity or sorority is a life-changing experience, beyond the time you are in school. Membership is for life.

Very concerned as alumni about the quality of the collegiate experience of our undergraduate members. Things have changed, certainly, and there are many things today that we can no longer do any more – we can’t serve kegs of beer. That’s why this dialogue is so important.

The Facebook page also points out why we need to work on our alumni experience. They need to be more involved. For example, why aren’t we raising money for the MTSU Foundation?

Today’s group is really a re-formation of the group established years ago to talk about on-campus housing for our Greeks. That group faded away. So, today, we again come back together as a forum to talk about what’s important to our Greek system. We have to show that we have zeal and enthusiasm.

McPhee:

This will be an open-listening session: We are not going to be defensive. Let’s brainstorm, together, then decide upon our top three or five areas of priority. We all have to have skin in this; it’s easy to point out the problems and walk away.

Presentation by Vice President Sells (attached)

Points or comments not in the presentation:

- Our enrollment this year includes 4,800 brand new undergraduates, with 2,942 first-time freshmen among them
- Our population is 52 percent women, 48 percent men
- MTSU has a 52 percent graduation on six-year rates

Gerald and Ty:

Could we market the Greek system as a way to help with retention and graduation: Greeks Graduate, worth the investment. How can we determine if Greeks have a higher graduation rate? We can do that through Banner, Deb Sells notes.

Paula:

Hold on and focus on that in our discussion.

Tim:

Average age of students and six-year graduation rate poses the question of how long are our members staying active in our chapter.

Deb:

Concerned about IFC numbers dropping.

Concerned about the expected 200- to 300-student negative impact expected at MTSU due to the Tennessee Promise.

Tom:

Community colleges don't provide the Greek experience. Is that a marketing point?

McPhee:

Yes, but it often comes down to money. Can they afford tuition and the Greek experience? Cites lower average household income among MTSU families About \$75,000) as compared to UTK families (about \$125,000)

Lindsey:

We would like to see the Greeks take back Greek Row. Some sororities have houses; some do not. If parents can tour during Customs, and see that they are nice and presentable, it would help with recruitment. ZTA meets in a classroom, girls have to sit in the floor. Why don't we have a house? Our girls have to pay extra to rent space on campus to practice on events for campus. Our national housing board is willing to look into building a house, but is that really an option on campus. Take back Greek Row and make it all Greeks again. Used to have chapter rooms; don't have that now. A huge selling point.

Tony:

Accessibility to space, concerned about not having the space. Going to First Baptist. You pay to come to this university and you want to have space for meetings and events. Tennessee State makes space available and don't have to wait 10 days to be confirmed. If we need to have an emergency meeting, we don't know where to tell our brother to go – or even if we can find space at all on campus.

Lindsay:

We were bumped from the Tom Jackson Building two days before the initiation.

McPhee:

With a campus this size, with the additional space we have opened up, I will need to get a good explanation on why we can't accommodate this space.

Paula:

Seems to be housing inequities. Would it be helpful if there were a Greek dorm so that in absence of a place on the row there could be some claim of a presence? Would that be important to the Deltas?

Ty:

Floors, perhaps, complete. Everyone used to have a room that they could come in and out of it when they please. Now, they have to reserve days in advance.

Lindsay:

Composites on the walls, trophies: Without a wall or a room, these get hidden or lost.

Scott:

“Slactivists” on the Facebook page. Seems like the turning point was when everything came on campus.

Kim:

About the houses on Greek Row, there was a mentality of “If you build it, they will come.” We are not Field of Dreams; we built twice as big as we needed. Monstrous, big, beautiful and cheaply built houses. That caused frustration from the very beginning.

Alums feel like they were sold something that they didn’t get. Ongoing frustration of members ages 18 to 24 is that they have to follow campus policies on alcohol. Issues where groups have pretty considerable risk management issues; no problem with putting the hammer down on them (not living up to organizations values). University and national organizations have to do them. Frustration: We built this, so come and do this for us.

What were the expectations for students, what are the changes, what do we need to do as university and organizations to promote filling those places? We’re looking at the same problems from 2004 that we had then that have not been address.

Space on campus has always been a problem. Chapter rooms were being closed due to renovations years ago. If we are looking to promote ourselves as part of this institution, that’s the stuff we need to look at. What is the university doing to help build that connection back between those alums?

Everyone has a need; my organization is not on campus. We as an organization are uncertain whether to come back because we are uncertain the environment is ready and receptive to us.

McPhee:

I’d like some specifics: What would you define on not being ready?

Ty:

We paid between \$3k to \$5k to rent space outside the Student Union for initiatives for them to have it. It included liability and other protections, but nothing happened. We can't afford those costs.

Lindsay:

Not allowed to use some facilities, don't know if we can have the space until two or three days before the event.

Tony:

Sometimes we only get a small window of days to get something done – and we can't get it done.

Paula:

Importance of having all the stakeholder in the conversation. Is your alumni association strong within your sorority? House corporation? Are we talking to the advisors? Collegians need to see this connection and know that it is working. Does Allison know who these players are and what they contribute to their processes?

Randy:

Gravitate to community as much to campus events. We should be able to provide those events in campus facilities. Can we get them at a discount at least? Meeting space: Some of those Greek groups had meetings in the basement of freshmen dorms. NPHC groups had those kinds of facilities; it would help to keep them involved. NPHC with transfers: A good mechanism to get those students. More targeted to campus.

Lindsay:

\$6-8k to use the Tucker Theater for one night. Lip-sync show cost us \$8k and we only made \$6k, so we went off campus next time to do them. Really, really expensive to put on events on campus.

Tim:

Membership and exposure of membership. How much time and attention are we getting at Customs? We-Haul has become a university event. Can't wear your letters, had to wear an overall shirt. Major portion of the CUSTOMS process, now we are just a stopover? Is there a more strategic plan for membership on campus?

Tom:

Thrilled to see a video. At Customs, and different things, the We-Hauls were started by the Greeks and was adopted by the university and the Greek office. At that point, this year, they were told not to wear their letters, not allowed to

promote themselves individually. University can't have the gall to tell someone you can't wear their letters; that's a First Amendment issue.

Allison:

It was recommended that all participants wear the same shirt for Fraternity and Sorority Life so that we can be more together and impactful.

McPhee:

An issue to see if the Greek undergraduates chapters came together and said this is what they want to do. We will figure this out and see if there is a feeling that they want to wear their letters. We will dig into this further; we will have a response. I like to know specifics and that allows me to tell you we can do this and not this.

Randy:

Suggested a video that you can show students about how many administrators, professors, others on campus are Greek.

McPhee:

Twenty minutes left. Let's think about the critical issues we need to address.

Tim:

What's our plan and how will we work with the university to make sure those fraternities and sororities who have closed can get back on campus as soon as possible and as effective as possible?

Scott:

Disciplinary issues, post-mortem. We have a responsibility to know what happened and why. We don't know and, because we don't know, we can't speak or react with knowledge or authority.

McPhee:

We can disclose. We make good judgments. We are not overreacting. We cannot permit students to engage in hazing and other dangerous activities. No searching for beer cans and little stuff. Decisions come to the President for review. We have to determine the seriousness of infractions, and we deal with the national offices in our investigations. All of that ties in. Facebook misinformation. Recent suspensions by some active chapters are the result of what the national did – and we just echoed it.

Gerald:

If the price of bring the chapter back is expelling all of the past, I would be good with that. One individual got involved in a DUI downtown; that was part of the chapter file. Police automatically send to Judicial Affairs. JA told them their plan was to hold their decision to hold the PKA suspension until all of them were gone. Pikes got bad advice from a bad source.

McPhee:

What entity or administrator determines when a chapter returns (asked Dr. Sells)?

Scott:

There's a disconnect. We need to say that we made these mistakes in the past, here's what we need to do to go forward.

McPhee:

One person should be the contact to sort out issues related to the future of the chapter: Deb Sells

Kim:

We want to come back. Deb? McPhee: Yes.

Tim:

We have to do our due diligence. It's a matter of positive programming, going beyond the Presidium thing. Ignorance of the law isn't a good defense. What are the perimeters that we are living in today?

Randy:

Look at a way to have progress with academic status reported to advisors within the semester. End of the semester is too late; can't uplift that person as a student.

McPhee:

Some communication. Signoff of FERPA laws would be needed for us to disclose an adult's academic records.

Allison:

We provide semester GPAs; not midterms.

Deb:

All students get a midterm grade. Don't know if I can collect them and give to you, but you can have them get them to you.

Randy:

If we can identify prior to elections?

Tom:

Can we set up a touring-and-monitoring system like athletics?

Scott:

How do we turn this into action items?

Ty:

Master list of all Greek advisors? Easier for us to contact. Who do we go to for what in the administration? McPhee: We can lay that out.

Paula:

Perception problems. Hashtag: #TRUEGreek. Can we promote ourselves?

Gerald:

Hominization of the Greek Life. We need us to be us. Fighting for pledges, a lot more higher numbers.

Tom:

Competition breeds excellence, instead of making everyone average.

Tim:

Foundation account supported by Greek alumni with a fund raising event?

Joe:

Tie into Spring Weekend, a time of engagement.

Joe:

Rules on supporting housing: Foundation money can go to that. Request every two or three months to promote scholarships.

Randy:

Greek sporting event ticket events, where a portion of the month goes to the organization?

James:

Preserve Greek culture, bring on campus, different pageants. Miss MTSU should be on campus.

Tom:

Asked for a list of our donors, what they bring in, we are told that we can't have that. Joe: State law, can you have them sign a waiver?

Tom:

Because we can't see who is giving, we can't see if it falls off. Bad bank draft, credit card. We would like to be able to do that. When we got the email back, it said we can't give this to a "third party;" offended us. Can we solve it? Joe: Yes.

McPhee:

We will have the scribe (Vice President Oppmann) write the notes, send them to them for your review. Suggest and offer clarification and correction.

I am very optimistic and excited that you have taken time to put the effort to build and address the issues. You have my commitment that we will do our part. Rome was not built in a day; some we have control over, some we do not. Big issue of cutting budgets; we can't make it a zero cost. As we work together, we can help reduce those costs and work together. I want to manage expectations.

My philosophy: Under-promise and over-deliver.

What I am promising is we will take a serious look at all of these issues, make adjustments, do a better job on being where we need to be.

Adjourn