

New Greeks strive for change

Historically black fraternities and sororities and SigEp take a different view on Greek life

By Sarah Kientz
REPORTER

Five organizations are working to attract diversity and prove that not all Greek life revolves around the keg.

Assistant Dean of Students Tammy Futrell is the adviser for all the historically black organizations that have chapters on campus, which includes the fraternities Alpha Phi Alpha and Phi Beta Sigma and the sororities Delta Sigma Theta and Alpha Kappa Alpha.

According to Futrell, the historically black Greek organizations are fairly new on campus.

"Last year at this time we had no Greek letter organizations of this type on campus, so we're sort of going through the growing pains right now," Futrell said. "It's a new thing for students of color and for the campus overall."

Futrell said historically black fraternities and sororities began on a national level to provide a

support base for African American students.

"These organizations were started at a time when African Americans were not welcomed into majority organizations," Futrell said. "They offered support and friendship, and are not as focused on the social aspect but on community service and on bettering the lives of others."

Futrell also pointed out the benefit of historically black Greek organizations as draws for minority students to consider Washington and Lee.

"It's a great recruiting tool for students of color because they have relatives and parents in these organizations," Futrell said. "It's something they can identify with and an opportunity for them to join."

Senior Ted Archer of Phi Beta Sigma said he and his fraternity brothers are trying to establish themselves this year through community service.

"Since this is our first full year of existence at W&L, it makes

sense that the other Greeks are given more attention. The Greek system has been a part of this school for a long time," he said. "I think the hard work that we put into trying to offer something positive and beneficial to the

"We have to be careful not to treat black Greeks as some sort of 'other' category."

TED ARCHER, CLASS OF 2006

W&L community will speak for itself."

According to Archer, members of Phi Beta Sigma currently volunteer at Maury River Middle School and Natural Bridge twice a month. The fraternity also hopes to organize two other functions in 2006, including a W&L Talent Show in February and a

White Party in April where they "hope to invite other Greeks from close by colleges and universities."

Archer said historically black fraternities differ from the larger fraternities on campus in that involvement extends far past the college experience.

"The main focus of most other Greeks is your four-year college career. For black Greeks, your commitment to your organization lasts most people their entire lives because of regional conferences, Graduate Chapters and Distinguished Service Chapters and so on," Archer said.

"The rich history of black Greeks, being that there are only nine really notable ones, truly makes them extraordinary when you think of some of the people who were black Greeks. People from Dr. Martin Luther King, to Langston Hughes, to James Weldon Johnson, to Emmitt Smith, to even Rick James," he said.

Overall, Archer said the more

attention given to historically black Greek organizations, the more they will become as widely accepted as the other Greeks on campus.

"I think more exposure and more articles such as this one is the direction that we should stay in because historically black fraternities and sororities are a part

of university life, a part of American culture, a part of our rich history as a country for that matter," Archer said. "We have to be careful not to treat black Greeks as some sort of 'other' category. There are some differences between black Greeks and other Greeks but the fundamental principles are all the same."

Junior Jasmine Randolph, president of the historically black sorority Delta Sigma Theta, said that, like Phi Beta Sigma, the focus of her sorority is on community service.

Members of Delta Sigma

SEE 'GREEK' ON PAGE 2

Greek options added

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Theta are currently involved in a tutoring and mentoring program with Highland Park Magnet School in Roanoke.

According to Randolph, the girls will be working with the Roanoke Alumnae chapter of DST on several of their national service projects.

These projects include Delta GEMS (Growing and Empowering Myself Successfully), a program targeted at preparing teenage African American girls for college, and Delta Academy, a tutoring and mentoring program aimed at African American girls in middle school.

Randolph wishes more attention were given to the historically black fraternities and sororities.

"I feel as if the historically black Greek organizations are often overlooked," she said.

"I think we really need to focus on making more people aware of our existence on campus and letting them know what these organizations are about."

Randolph and two other W&L students are involved in the Tau Omega chapter of Delta Sigma Theta, which is a joint chapter between students at W&L, Roanoke College and Hollins University.

The chapter was chartered in April 2005, and Randolph hopes that in the future Delta Sigma Theta will become more localized on W&L's campus.

"I hope that Delta Sigma Theta will grow in numbers on W&L's campus in the future and will be more widely known about on campus," Randolph said.

"I also hope that W&L will be able to attain their own chapter of DST that is not joint with other schools, [and that] we will be able to become more in-

"I think awareness is being raised, lots of questions are being asked, and lots of people are curious about AKA and the other historically black fraternities and sororities."

YVONNE COKER, CLASS OF 2008

involved with the current Greek system."

Like Archer, Randolph noted the difference between historically black fraternities and the more popular Greek system on campus in that black organizations stress the lifetime commitment of being involved in service.

"A major difference is that our sorority ties last a lifetime," Randolph said. "We still participate in the sorority even after graduating from college and because of this we have a huge networking basis."

The historically black sorority Alpha Kappa Alpha is also beginning its own chapter at W&L.

Sophomores Yvonne Coker, Jessica Hopper and Quiana McKenzie are currently involved in establishing a charter here and hoping to begin the sorority next year.

"I've always admired women I knew in AKA and saw them as hardworking, proud, outstanding black women and have aspired to be one," Coker said.

Coker added that Futrell and Director of Campus Activities Margo McClinton, both members of AKA, have helped inspire the girls to continue their efforts to establish the sorority.

Right now, Coker, Hopper and McKenzie are focusing on the five target areas the president of the national AKA program has spearheaded.

These goals include education, the black family, health, the

economy and the arts.

The girls are currently involved in community service through Roanoke's Beta Chi Omega graduate chapter of AKA.

Coker said that she is pleased with the attention AKA has received thus far from members of the W&L community.

"I think awareness is being raised, lots of questions are being asked and lots of people are curious about AKA and the other historically black fraternities and sororities," Coker said. "It's opened up dialogue and made people aware of our service and activities and are taking us more seriously because we do want to collaborate with other Greek life to create a community on campus."

Sigma Phi Epsilon (SigEp) is also returning to campus as a different breed of fraternity.

According to senior Drew Davenport, SigEp is re-colonizing at W&L after its three-year absence.

"We're trying to return to W&L as a fraternity that focuses on the fundamentals of what frats should be about," he said.

This includes a "sound mind and sound body under the Balanced Man program," Davenport said.

"On a national level, SigEp is trying to eliminate the 'frat boy' image of *Animal House*. We're not a drinking club. We're focused on sharing the ideals of being well-balanced and well-rounded," he said.

Although Davenport hopes SigEp will not be viewed as an *Animal House* type of fraternity, he also stressed that the frat will host campus-wide activities. "We're not a dry fraternity, and we're not prohibited from having alcohol," Davenport said, "but we're not going to squash money on parties."

Davenport said some of the activities SigEp has already planned include etiquette parties with the sororities, swing-dancing lessons and art museum visits.

He added that he hopes members of the W&L community will accept SigEp's philosophy, although it may take time.

Davenport said the W&L chapter of SigEp needs to earn back its charter by gaining members and doing certain activities in order to prove that they will abide by the Balanced Man philosophy.

Although SigEp currently has 11 members, Davenport says they will not regain the charter until next year.

Freshman Taylor Embury is one of the seven freshmen planning to join SigEp.

Embury said he saw SigEp as a middle ground between being independent and joining one of the more popular fraternities.

"I felt that with other fraternities you were trying to fit yourself into a mold, and I liked the idea of starting from scratch [with SigEp]," Embury said.

"Everybody feels they have to give into the traditional fraternity image or be independent, but we want to be a middle ground," he said.

These organizations realize that the social scene will be difficult to change, but they are working to give students a choice.