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Greek Life
Sororities
Fraternities

Along with western perimeter of the UMO campus, standing in an uneven line along both sides of College Avenue, is fraternity row: 17 houses each bearing a different set of Greek symbols, like the titles on book bindings.

Like the book that can't be judged by its cover, the content of these houses is hidden behind those Greek letters.

Who are the fraternity men? How many are there? What do they think of themselves?

From a gradual beginning spanning the final 25 years of the nineteenth century, the social fraternity system in Orono has grown to encompass 19 organizations, 17 houses, and 18 percent of the university's male enrollment.

More than 700 men are active in the UMO social fraternity system today. That number alone would be enough to attract attention, but fraternity men display other characteristics besides sheer numbers.

To begin with, most come from WASP-Republican backgrounds. Chances are good that a fraternity man's family income is better than $15,000 per year, making him an upper middle-class member.

A survey conducted last fall by Thomas Drew, a member of the Delta Upsilon fraternity, tends to bear out these assumptions.

Drew surveyed 339 fraternity men and came up with these findings.

1) Better than 45 percent of those contacted were Protestants; 36 professed to be Catholics.
2) 55 percent came from Anglo-Saxon backgrounds; no other ethnic group had better than 12 percent representation.
3) 47.5 percent said their fathers were registered as Republicans compared to 32.5 percent whose fathers were Democrats; close to 50 percent answered that their mothers were Republican and 27 percent of their mothers were Democrats.
4) Just over 50 percent said their family's total income for the previous year was more than $15,000; another 30 percent came from families that earned between $10,000 and $15,000.
5) One out of three surveyed was from out of state. Why does this composite seem to be predominant in the fraternity ranks? Associate Professor Kenneth Hayes of the UMO Department of Political Science, and a former member of Beta Theta Pi, hypothesized that. "Frats have traditionally recruited members from such a background." He added that these men are probably second or third generation college students (i.e., their parents and grandparents also attended college) whose parents may have been fraternity or sorority members. Thus, he says a tradition may be involved.

Despite their conservative background, many fraternity members seem to lean more toward the center and the left than their parents. The following figures from the Drew survey back this up.

1) 33 percent of those fraternity men registered to vote are Republicans; 36 percent Independents; and 29 percent Democrats. The Republican figure is far below that of their parents.
2) Despite their official party affiliation, only 17 percent (at the time of the survey) thought of themselves as Republicans; 40 percent as Independents; and 25 percent as Democrats.
In the 1972 Presidential election, 36 percent of the fraternity men voted for Nixon and 32 percent for McGovern. This is a far cry from the national figures in which Nixon got over 60 percent and McGovern more than 38 percent. Nearly 29 percent of the men did not vote, something Prof. Hayes says is typical of young people.

Scholastically, the average fraternity man does as well or just slightly better than most men on campus. According to figures kept by the Office of Student Activities and Organizations, in the first semester of this academic year, the average frat man had a grade point average of 2.45, compared to the all-men's average of 2.30. Over the last four years, however, these two figures are almost identical.

Other than background similarities, why do men join the fraternity system? Those frat men interviewed almost unanimously say the fraternity system gives its members a greater opportunity for involvement than does the dormitory system.

Don Raymond, president of Delta Upsilon, a dorm based social fraternity, summed it up when he said those who join are "people who are looking to get more involved with a working organization." Steve Atkinson of Sigma Phi Epsilon concurred with Raymond, "They (fraternity men) have an active desire to get into things." Most of the men contacted indicated that leadership opportunities are greater at a fraternity house.

Much of this activity involves maintaining the house structure itself. Most men are assigned various duties around the house, which many claim gives them the feeling of playing an active role in their living situation. Activities outside the house include service work for the university and surrounding communities.

In addition, many men join a fraternity because they are looking for a way of life that can't be found in a dorm or off campus. Prof. Hayes says, "Many have a need for a structured lifestyle." This structured lifestyle, he adds, includes such qualities as loyalty, friendship, and sharing in group endeavors, which the fraternities try to socialize into their members.

Dan Smyth, president of Alpha Gamma Rho, echoes Hayes when he says, "Guys join who aren't as outgoing. They're looking for social stability." Delta Upsilon's Raymond puts it another way, "It is easier to associate with one group of men than a whole dorm." Raymond adds that many men look to fraternities if they feel a need for companionship and brotherhood, something he says the looser dormitory lifestyle may not offer.

All this seems to point to the image of a closeknit, family-type structure which Memorial Union Director Dave Rand, a Phi Gamma Delta (Fifi) alumnus, calls "mutually exclusive," that is, excluding others from becoming a part. For a fraternity to have impact, Rand says, its members must have "the courage to call one another brother and accept the responsibility that it implies." This invokes the family picture of brothers pitching in to help one another in times of crisis. Dan Lawless, president of TKE, also saw fraternities as a family, adding that they provide a person a chance to become close with a group of people.

If the fraternities' family structure is to survive economically, it must attract new members. It was a lack of student interest nationally that forced the fraternity system into a
tailspin between 1968 and 1970. At the University of Rhode Island, for instance, two fraternities closed between 1968 and 1973 because they were unable to rush new members. A third URI house is also in danger of closing for this same reason.

The Rhode Island story is typical of campuses across the country, where changing lifestyles and political activism turned many students' attention away from fraternities.

Here at UMO fraternity membership has remained stable over the last four years, showing a slight dip of 14 men in 1972-73.

While membership showed little change from 1970-74, student attitudes toward fraternities at UMO have plunged as gauged by the Department of Political Science's annual Student Attitudes Survey (SAS).

In the spring of 1968, the first year the SAS was conducted, fully 74 percent of those contacted said they would encourage a friend to join a fraternity. In 1969, the figure was 68 percent. In 1970, the year of Kent State and the Cambodian incursion, when student activism reached its peak, the SAS records show a drop to 46 percent in affirmative responses to this same question, "Would you encourage a friend to join a fraternity?" A second, less dramatic nine-point drop occurred in 1972, when only 37 percent answered affirmatively. Responses have remained at 1972 levels since that time.

Although activism may have played a part in the precipitous drop on the fraternity question, another more local occurrence may explain it. In the fall of 1969 a major change in dormitory regulations took place at UMO; the campus became "wet". Those students of legal age (then 21 years old) could for the first time bring alcohol into their rooms. This was compounded in 1970 by the advent of co-ed dorms and expanded visitation privileges. In 1972, 18 became the legal drinking age, adding to the effect of these changes. Previously, fraternities had a virtual monopoly in these areas.

As Prof. Hayes put it, "The university has wiped out the social advantages of fraternities. The university has become truly competitive." Five years ago the frats had a monopoly on the advantages of social life on campus, Hayes continued. They offered privacy with a date and a place to drink alcohol.

Sigma Alpha Epsilon president Mark Gray pointed to the dorm lifestyle changes when he said co-ed dorms have hurt fraternity life. He offered no further elaboration.

Despite this loss, one social advantage may still remain, in the area of dating.

"There is, indeed, a dating advantage to being in a fraternity," says Prof. Hayes. "Brothers, say 15 of 30 in a given house, have steady dates, who have friends that are introduced to other brothers." He points out that this is an advantage because dorm residents tend to have less intimate relationships and fewer close friends than do frat men.

Lawless, Gray and Smyth all concur.

According to Gray, "There is more pressure (in a fraternity) to get dates, and there is more opportunity."

Smyth agreed saying, "Dorm men have to make their own contacts." But in the fraternities, "sororities are invited down to meet the brothers."

Although he, too, agreed, Lawless qualified his statement
by adding, "Co-ed dorms have definite advantages" in this area as well.

Despite this advantage, and perhaps as a direct result of their loss of popularity in 1970, the fraternity system has been confronted with an image problem. As Rand put it, "You mention frat to people and they conjure up some wild idea which could or could not be true."

DU's Raymond also acknowledged the image problem when he said, "Sometimes it is hard to build an image from the student point of view." He also claimed that if a fight occurs at a house party, it seems to reflect on the whole house.

Atkinson of Sig EP pointed at the campus press saying, "Articles in the campus paper can influence people negatively."

Some students hold certain images of fraternity men, the most predominant of which is the "jock" image. As one Androscoggin Hall resident explained, "I mostly think of them as being in sports." Even some fraternity men think this way, as evidenced by Gray when he said, "Every house looks for some jocks."

The idea of group identity among fraternity men is also recognized by "non-Greek" students. To one male dorm resident, fraternity men brought to mind the concept of "insecurity in numbers; insecurity about being an individual."

Sharon Edwards, a freshman from Oxford Hall, said, "I picture someone who wants to belong to a specific group."

Many fraternities are trying to combat their image problems, mostly by participating in service work for the surrounding communities. Both Sig Ep and SAE helped the town of Orono with its May clean-up campaign, and many fraternity members participated (in April) in the 400-mile run-a-thon which received $10,000 in pledges for a statewide senior citizens minibus transportation program.

Despite the problems of bad image, lack of popularity, and loss of social advantages which are plaguing them, there is a ray of hope for the fraternities. A recent upsurge in fraternity popularity has occurred throughout the region and the nation. At the University of Connecticut, membership has jumped close to 33 percent in the last year. Fraternity Affairs officials at UMass claim that fraternity ranks there have increased by 15 percent adding that 1973-74 saw the "largest pledging for the last seven of eight years."

Nationally, the upswing in fraternity popularity prompted Newsweek magazine to publish an article entitled "The Frat is Back" in its Nov. 12, 1973 edition.

This upsurge in popularity, coupled with the fraternities' offer of an alternative lifestyle for those who need it, will help to partially offset their problems. Thus, as long as this need for a close-knit, socially stable lifestyle exists in men, the fraternity will have a place at UMO, although the going may be rough.
Delta Upsilon

Lambda Chi Alpha