

# **Mockery of Philanthropy: How the Inter Fraternity Council of Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo Disassociates from Philanthropic Tradition**

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## Introduction

My intention for this research is to reintroduce a history that has been largely overlooked in relation to its impact on the student body at Cal Poly. Moreover, this research will ideally propose skepticism surrounding the primary claim of Greek life regarding its relevance to the independent student body, and greater community of San Luis Obispo. The Inter Fraternity Council of Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo has been historically inadequate in their philanthropic efforts, while attempting to classify charitable donation as true philanthropy.

The nobility of giving has long been valued. Yet, there are various approaches and degrees to this giving. I wish to define and distinguish two of these terms, as their differences are key to understanding the scope of this argument. Philanthropy strategically identifies and addresses the root cause of societal disharmony via monetary or physical resources.<sup>1</sup> Charity seeks to provide direct relief to individuals, such as food, shelter, healthcare, etcetera. Perhaps this distinction is best exemplified with a consistent target, such as homelessness. A philanthropic attempt to combat homelessness would likely include agencies committed to addressing social and economic inequalities responsible for homelessness. Compare this to a charitable attempt, which is more concerned with immediate needs of the homeless such as food, water, and shelter. While

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<sup>1</sup> Karen Goetz, "Philanthropy vs. Charity-What's the difference," *Richard Shineman Foundation*, 2/03/2014, <http://www.shinemanfoundation.org/part-3-philanthropy-vs-charity-whats-difference>, accessed 2/1/2016.

there is nobility in pursuit of both endeavors, addressing root forms of distress should take precedence over a continual cover-up of pre-existing societal conditions.

In the age of the modern fraternity, charity and philanthropy are the uniting concepts that provide legitimacy to the organizations among their student body, administration, and communities at large. Take into account negative continuities of fraternity life on others, and this legitimacy should in fact be emphasized to an utmost degree. At the national level, select individual fraternities are finally beginning to take steps in eliminating this negative implication. Christopher Lapple, current General Council President of the Phi Delta Theta Fraternity, has a deep desire to address the increasingly negative connotations surrounding fraternity life. The evolution of the modern fraternity has begun, with Phi Delta Theta providing much needed leadership to the rest of the national fraternal system. In response to two undergraduate alcohol-related deaths, Phi Delta Theta has enacted alcohol-free housing since 1997, while re-emphasizing founding principles of friendship, scholarship, and rectitude.<sup>2</sup> Despite preemptive criticism of certain organizational weakening, Phi Delta Theta has experienced a 41.37 percent increase in membership each year, while increasing advising and donation.<sup>3</sup> Why such a dramatic benefit? Without question the removal of alcohol from at Phi Delta Theta chapter houses has allowed alumni to comfortably donate their time and money, while refocusing into progressive programming for the student body, community, and members. Unfortunately from a national standpoint, Phi Delta Theta's progressive leadership is an outlier among the fraternity system.

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<sup>2</sup> Christopher Lapple, "The Evolution of the Modern Fraternity," *Phi Delta Theta Fraternity*, 3/13/2014, <https://www.phideltatheta.org/2014/03/the-evolution-of-the-modern-fraternity/>, accessed 1/27/2016.

<sup>3</sup>

Modern fraternity life, though highly beneficial for those pursuing business, law, and politics, continues to promote its history of violence that isolates the independent student body and greater community surrounding the university. Caitlyn Flanagan exposed several endemic problems highlighted by a system that seemingly refuses to accept responsibility for its actions. Nationally, more than 60 individuals have lost their lives since 2005.<sup>4</sup> This number is dwarfed by other injuries, assaults, and sexual crimes that are finally becoming transparent lawsuits. Even more astounding is the university-fraternity relationship that has provoked these disastrous continuities. There remains a mutually exclusive expectation in this relationship: Allow students the same exclusion of the *in loco parentis* experience fought for by their parents in the 1960s, while expecting administration to protect physical and emotional well-being for those participating in said experience. Until this expectation of protection shifts equally onto the shoulders of fraternal leadership, there will be continued instances of finger pointing with no real progression. Alas, a progression that should be measured not by membership or popularity, but by fostering positive relations between Greek and non-Greek members alike via philanthropy. Fraternities nationwide should take steps similar to Phi Delta Theta while simultaneously increasing philanthropic effort to mend the very real gap that grows wider with each incident.

Circa 1960-1975

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<sup>4</sup> Caitlin Flanagan, "The Dark Power of Fraternities," *The Atlantic*, March 2014, <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2014/03/the-dark-power-of-fraternities/357580/>, accessed 1/24/2016.

*Article I Preamble:*

*“To foster and promote brotherly love, to inaugurate a spirit of cooperation and helpfulness, to create better understanding among our members, to encourage vigorous participation in the activities of Cal Poly, and general activities in our community to the mutual benefit of all concerned.” –IFC Council Codes, Cal Poly, 1960<sup>5</sup>*

The above preamble under the IFC council codes is a premier representation of the Inter Fraternity Council’s failure to recognize the significance of word choice and rhetoric. This section will highlight the vague and untruthful first article with emphasis on participation in the general activities in the community to the mutual benefit of all concerned.

Former dean of students Everett Chandler, as a former Greek life participant, was highly skeptical in establishing social fraternities on campus. “It is generally agreed that there is something a little bit ‘Mickey Mouse’ about many of their activities that extend youthful activities and inhibit an adult response.”<sup>6</sup> Synonymous with Chandler’s suspicions, 1960 alone offers clear insight into the priorities of IFC, which were dominated by a 3:1 social to philanthropic ratio. Enter the committee of IFC committed to Beer Blast. Here, a priority was set to deliver 8 kegs at the cost of 1 dollar per student, with each house bartending for one hour.<sup>7</sup> Three months prior, IFC had arranged the Beer Bust invitational located at Estrada Gardens, including four kegs, chips, and other activities.<sup>8</sup> An additional committee was established for final preparations involving the rush week car rally, and another establishing rush week’s annual Toga Dance. Moving

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<sup>5</sup> Cal Poly IFC, “IFC Council Codes,” 10/30/1960, (San Luis Obispo: Cal Poly University Archives, Robert Kennedy Library).

<sup>6</sup> Everett Chandler, “Dean of Students Explains College Fraternity Stand,” *The Mustang Daily* (San Luis Obispo, CA 1/11/1963).

<sup>7</sup> IFC Council Minutes, (San Luis Obispo: Cal Poly University Archives, Robert Kennedy Library, 5/5/1960).

<sup>8</sup> IFC Council Minutes, (San Luis Obispo: Cal Poly University Archives, Robert Kennedy Library, 2/21/1960).

beyond this twelve-month span, the establishment of weekly parties titled “T.G.I.F” would prove to have devastating effect of the Greek, independent, and greater San Luis Obispo community.

Another disturbing influence of IFC as it pertains to the independent student body is the complex relationship of negative TGIF impact, and IFC’s infiltration and influence of the greater Association of Students Incorporated (ASI). IFC-related “Thank God It’s Friday” parties had long been the primary source of public disturbances, yet it was not until 1977 that Chief of Police Robert Neuman released a memorandum concerning T.G.I.F.’s and their impact of the surrounding community. Listed in the memo are a series of complains received from non-student community members including disturbances, theft, trespassing, intoxicated driving and littering.<sup>9</sup> Additionally, individuals attending these gatherings were not easy to disperse, and responded with violence in more than one occasion. “On two occasions in the Broad Street area, our officers and equipment have been pelted with stones and bottles.”<sup>10</sup> Negative association with fraternity events caused IFC to seek connections to the independent student body, so as to curb negative connotations of fraternity life. Beginning with the 1974/1975 Spring ASI elections, IFC sought expanding influence over the will of the majority. “IFC will try to have a slate on the spring elections. We may have a chance due to poor voter turnout.”<sup>11</sup> The movement to seek influence over independent students from the political platform did not stop there. Synonymous to current political trends in this country, IFC

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<sup>9</sup> Roger Neuman, “T.G.I.F.’s and Their Impact on the Surrounding Neighborhood” (Mommorandum, City of San Luis Obispo, Police Department, 11/22/1977).

<sup>10</sup>  
<sup>11</sup> IFC Council Minutes, (San Luis Obispo: Cal Poly University Archives, Robert Kennedy Library, 11/20/1974).

used their influence and power to direct potentially favorable political actions in student government. "...It was brought up at the meeting that IFC could get political favors from an ASI president. It was further brought up that IFC would prefer to endorse a Greek candidate."<sup>12</sup> This political mechanism of deception was completed with the IFC President Dee Slayman's T.G.I.F.-ASI relationship in an attempt to curb support resulting from negative social events. "Dee (Slayman) met with ASI president Scott Plotkin concerning T.G.I.F situation and fraternity related problems. ASI is backing us."<sup>13</sup> To many an independent student, this constitutes one's worst fear: IFC manipulation of the greater student body and community to promote selfish social activities; something Everett Chandler and his forerunners were obviously wary to address.

Yet, the former dean also admits to the value of the philanthropic aspect in fraternity life. "Admittedly, fraternities have demonstrated worthwhile projects from place to place and from time to time."<sup>14</sup> Unfortunately unforeseeable to Everett Chandler, the future fifteen years during and after his tenure would prove this notion mildly accurate at best. IFC's understanding of philanthropy has been perverted since its inception. When an organization's serious attempt at philanthropy involves fixing two baseball diamonds they use on a weekly basis, there exists some level of distortion of how this group understands philanthropy.<sup>15</sup> There is very little bedrock societal gain in fixing two baseball diamonds, let alone ones used for that individual or group's purpose.

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<sup>12</sup> IFC Council Minutes, (San Luis Obispo: Cal Poly University Archives, Robert Kennedy Library, 4/2/1975).

<sup>13</sup> IFC Council Minutes, (San Luis Obispo: Cal Poly University Archives, Robert Kennedy Library, 10/30/1974).

<sup>14</sup> Everett Chandler, "Dean of Students Explains College Fraternity Stand," *The Mustang Daily* (San Luis Obispo, CA), 1/11/1963.

<sup>15</sup> IFC Council Minutes, (San Luis Obispo: Cal Poly University Archives, Robert Kennedy Library, 2/12/1960).

This lack of seriousness and understanding is further evidenced by IFC's rejection of a legitimate philanthropic proposition introduced by the San Luis Obispo City Planning Commission. Instead of participating or supporting city-wide architectural progress, the proposal was ultimately rejected as "...not the kind of project (they) were seeking."<sup>16</sup> The continuity of philanthropic rejection and does not stop here. A 1975 proposal to clean San Luis Creek was forwarded as the most feasible project, yet upon further appraisal it was unwarranted. "Several people checked San Luis Creek to determine what portions needed to be cleaned...there were heavy concentrations of poison oak ... they reported the creek was not dirty enough to clean and suggested another project be found."<sup>17</sup> The substitution for the Creek clean up was slated for a three to five hour service project cleaning at Avila Beach. Of course this is not to say there have been zero virtuous attempts from IFC. Tree planting projects, mental health drives, a heart fund drive, and canned food drives all provided valuable donations to the community.<sup>18</sup> However, these donations were incorrectly labeled as endeavors of philanthropy. One can clearly see these efforts have zero effect on the underlying causes of pollution, mental illness, heart disease, and hunger respectively. Instead, these charitable efforts provide basic monetary support for the surface treatment of societal and communal problems.

There remains the question of intent, by which these charitable efforts were created. Most would assume it is within the character of the Fraternity way, in holding oneself to a higher standard, by helping one's community and society. Unfortunately, it

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<sup>16</sup> IFC Council Minutes, (San Luis Obispo: Cal Poly University Archives, Robert Kennedy Library, 11/16/1971).

<sup>17</sup> IFC Council Minutes, (San Luis Obispo: Cal Poly University Archives, Robert Kennedy Library, 5/1/1975).

<sup>18</sup> IFC Council Minutes, (San Luis Obispo: Cal Poly University Archives, Robert Kennedy Library, 5/3/1962).

appears their true inspiration for charitable effort is one of positive publicity in order to combat negative publicity involving social efforts. The clearest example of publicity priority is the 1974 rejection of the MECHA grassroots Chicano organization alliance with the canned food drive. Proceeds would have benefited the greater SLO county community, with wider impact due combined effort of grassroots participation. There appeared to be no conscious dilemma among IFC leadership concerning greater positive impact onto the less fortunate, rather there was a great concern for bettering their image. Ultimately it was decided, “Keep the food drive to ourselves as we need the good publicity.”<sup>19</sup> Thus, a potential greater good abandoned so to acquire exclusive publicity from Mustang Daily and other media outlets. Another instance of publicity favoring nobility was the 1975 response to a potential community project for Redwood Manor. “It was decided that IFC would, if we were assured by Mr. Jackson and the Telegraph Tribune that we would be well publicized.”<sup>20</sup> Adequate publicity allowed for the continuation of the project. Perhaps the 1974 IFC presidents meeting best describes IFC’s stance on purpose in relation to serving their community. “In regards to service, Cal Poly is self-contained. Tailor service to desired effect on desired persons and obtain coverage accordingly.”<sup>21</sup> This misrepresentation of charitable and philanthropic attempts solidifies IFC’s semantic confusion, and fails in providing legitimacy to the independent student body, and greater San Luis Obispo community.

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<sup>19</sup> IFC Council Minutes, (San Luis Obispo: Cal Poly University Archives, Robert Kennedy Library, 11/13/1974).

<sup>20</sup> IFC Council Minutes, (San Luis Obispo: Cal Poly University Archives, Robert Kennedy Library, 10/1/1975).

<sup>21</sup> Dee Slayman, “IFC President’s Meeting” (San Luis Obispo: Cal Poly University Archives, Robert Kennedy Library, 11/24/1974).

## Comparison

Nationally, the North American Inter Fraternity Council (NAIFC) promotes advocacy for the representation of fraternities, public relations, and campus intervention among others. In addition to these benefits, NAIFC lists specific standards for IFC chapters as they pertain to academics, membership, and alcohol. These standards are established by collaboration. For example, the alcohol initiative was established by a connection between fraternal organizations, fostered by representing higher education task forces. There exists further explanation into how the national council explains its standards. “These standards are a true partnership opportunity between fraternities and campus communities to raise the bar of the fraternity experience.”<sup>22</sup> This evokes a reliance on individual charters to fully engage in the process.

Individual charters may choose to ignore the high standards set by the national council, however there should be strict attention given to the level of real philanthropic investment NAIFC has created. The National Interfraternity Council Foundation evokes true philanthropy in the sense that it adheres to solving core issues as they pertain to the given subject. Unfortunately, NAIFC’s subject is the advancement of economic interest. Since the early 1990s the NIC foundation’s seminar has established educational opportunity for those who desire to collaborate and explore new solutions to shared business problems. In 2015, the seminar offered 33 educational block sessions, and two

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<sup>22</sup> North American Interfraternity Conference, “NIC Standards,” *The North American Interfraternity Council*, <http://www.nicindy.org/nic-standards.html>, accessed 2/3/2016.

highly regarded general speakers.<sup>23</sup> The establishment of a foundation provides a blueprint in creating foundational change to a host of challenges we face, be it poverty, hunger, or business. Cal Poly IFC should respond to the national council with their own establishment of foundational philanthropy, independent of strict monetary donation, as a measure of evoking large-scale impact.

#### Circa 2005-Present

Following the years of IFC's inception there existed a lack of interest for philanthropic or charitable attempts. Fortunately, the range of interest has appeared to increase, as all individual fraternities involved in IFC submit quarterly service hours. There remains, however, the reinforced dogma that these services are fundamentally philanthropic in nature. Given all the insistence that IFC philanthropy is reinforcing a community relationship, there continues to be zero philanthropic response to socially created disasters including the death of Carson Starkey, and the infamous St. Fratty's Day of 2015.

Lambda Chi Alpha with IFC generated \$4,000 and 2,300 cans of food during their 2015 philanthropic partnership with Cal Poly affiliated sororities, known as Watermelon Bust.<sup>24</sup> The event is partnered with Feeding America, a non-profit organization with enough resources to provide a nation-wide array of food banks. Again, one sees a continuity of IFC related events claiming fundamental societal change to the problems of

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<sup>23</sup> North American Interfraternity Conference, "The Foundations Seminar," *The North American Interfraternity Conference*, <http://www.nicindy.org/the-foundations-seminar.html>, accessed 1/30/2016.

<sup>24</sup> Lambda Chi Alpha, Phi Sigma Zeta Chapter, "Philanthropy," *Cal Poly Lambda Chi Alpha*, 11/15/2015, Accessed 2/9/2016, <http://www.calpolylambdachi.com/philanthropy/>.

hunger by a mere canned food drive and monetary donation. If these cans of food and monetary donation are not addressing the causes of hunger (i.e. economic inequality, poverty, etc.), there should be absolutely no claim regarding this effort as philanthropic in nature. Suffice to say, there is certainly nobility in providing charity to those in need. After viewing a Watermelon Bust video sponsored by a Greek promotion-based college website, known as The Social Life, doubts of this projects nobility may come into question. Throughout the approximately two minute and thirty second long video, ten seconds are dedicated to forms of charitable donation, with the remaining two minutes plus flaunts the benefits of stereotypical Greek social life. Perhaps viewing this video should be the benchmark in understanding the real commitment IFC provides in ending hunger, as underscored by consistent embellishment favoring of social life to hands-on, grass roots, or philanthropic ventures.<sup>25</sup>

In 2008, at the fate of traditional Cal Poly fall Greek rush, a young man under the age of 21 was fatally poisoned via alcohol. Regardless of the heinous details, including “brothers” refusing him medical attention while leaving him alone in a room to die, there appeared extreme lack of responsibility shown by IFC to foster community outreach or philanthropy, let alone a desire to change their ways. It was not Cal Poly IFC, but the Dean of Students, that took a stand against Sigma Alpha Epsilon, resulting in their disaffiliation. Unfortunately, SAE is still eligible for reinstatement in the year 2033.<sup>26</sup> It was not Cal Poly IFC, but the organization founded by the young man’s family, “Aware

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<sup>25</sup> Lambda Chi Alpha, Phi Sigma Zeta Chapter, *Cal Poly SLO Lambda Chi’s 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Watermelon Bust Philanthropy- November 11, 2015*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZCKnGHhppLM>, Video (2015, Youtube.com), accessed 2/18/15.

<sup>26</sup> Cal Poly San Luis Obispo Greek Life- Interfraternity Council, “About”(Judicial-Disaffiliations), *Cal Poly IFC*, <http://calpolyifc.com/about/>, accessed 2/4/2016.

Awake Alive,” coupled with the Dean of Students, that forced mandatory alcohol awareness training to the Greek community. The organization’s selfless mission to prevent another tragedy by promoting education, dialogue, and partnership should have rested on the conscious leadership of IFC, but instead was independently mediated via Aware Awake Alive. This utter failure to take action in a time of crisis should cement IFC’ reputation as it pertains to its social priority.

What occurred beginning at 4:30 on the morning of March 7<sup>th</sup>, 2015 was the peak of Greek influence on the student body of Cal Poly. St. Fratty’s day is the traditional gathering of Cal Poly students on Hathaway Avenue in celebration of the end of winter quarter, in addition to it’s implied namesake. Now disaffiliated Sigma Phi Epsilon founded the event in 2006.<sup>27</sup> During 2015’s edition, IFC chapters were already on social probation for sexual assault allegations, and were largely deemed unaccountable for the events that took place, highlighted by a roof collapse. Although the event was technically not Greek-oriented, there are reports that many Greek members attended based on letters, social media, and word of mouth.<sup>28</sup> The irony in claiming no direct Greek connection or facilitation to an event of such title and founding is ludicrous, and yet because no specific Greek chapter organized the event, IFC went without blame. Regardless of university response, the real devastating blow was dealt to student-community relations. IFC’s official response pinned the blame on the general student body, by “calling on all Cal Poly students to join in Greek Life’s commitment to the prevention of dangerous and

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<sup>27</sup> Mustang News Staff, “St. Fratty’s Day Party not Associated with Greek Life, Fraternity Presidents Say,” *Mustang News*, 5/11/2015, <http://mustangnews.net/st-frattys-day-party-not-associated-with-greek-life-fraternity-presidents-say/>, accessed 2/8/2016.

<sup>28</sup> Jean DeCosta, Cal Poly Student Affairs, “March 7, 2015, Incident Final Report”.

unruly gatherings.”<sup>29</sup> There is no evidence of specific philanthropic or charitable events established in response to mend the ever-growing wounds. Instead, these leaders chose to shift the blame and move on. On April 17, 2015, IFC was lifted off of social probation after creating a plan “to change the culture around sexual assault.”<sup>30</sup>

The Inter Fraternity Council of Cal Poly has sought legitimacy to their social endeavors through a means of giving back to the San Luis Obispo community and student body. Years following the initiation of IFC show a greater preference to social events over philanthropy or charity. While recent ventures appear to be more balanced, there continues to be a profound distortion in considering what constitutes philanthropy. This appears as the ultimate continuity seen throughout the development of IFC. Historically, the Inter Fraternity Council has given preference to social efforts, while labeling donation of a fiscal and substantive nature as true philanthropy. To the independent student and San Luis Obispo resident, this is a representation of inadequate benevolence in which this organization was founded upon. A lack of understanding exists in what embodies philanthropy, or perhaps this council of students desires this label as a marketing tool to deflect negative association often created by the very social efforts they place precedence. Regardless of their delusion, it has become the responsibility of the independent student body to take a stand against the negative impact this council has repeatedly imposed on the residential community of San Luis Obispo. Grass roots efforts,

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<sup>29</sup> Cal Poly Interfraternity and Panhellenic Councils, “Letter to the Editor: Greek Life Apologizes for St. Frattys’ Day events,” *Mustang News*, 3/21/2015, <http://mustangnews.net/letter-to-the-editor-greek-life-apologizes-for-st-frattys-day-events/>, accessed 2/8/16.

<sup>30</sup> Olivia Proffit, “Greek Life Off Social Probation after 13 Weeks,” *Mustang News*, 4/17/2015, <http://mustangnews.net/greek-life-off-social-probation-after-13-weeks/>, accessed 2/9/16.

coupled with addressing foundational issues of negative aspects in our society and community should not be compromised by selfishness and self-interest. Certainly, we as members of the civilized human race can transcend the notion of brotherhood beyond the confines of twenty-four Greek letters.

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