

What: Panhellenic Retreat
Who: Campus Greek leaders—7 representatives from each sorority or fraternity
and one mentor from each group.
When: April 20, 1996

Good morning. It is a pleasure to speak to so many of the members of Georgia Tech's Greek community. As you may or may not know, I myself was a member of a fraternity while a student here at Tech. I won't mention which one, but I am happy to announce that purple will soon join the white and gold as one of Georgia Tech's official colors.

Seriously, I will always fondly remember my days in the fraternity. While a fraternity member, I gained leadership skills, learned a little bit about communicating and working with others, participated in rewarding service activities, and learned how to drive a mean tricycle at top speeds.

It is somewhat ironic that I now reside in the President's Office in the Carnegie Building. As a FIJI, I spent some very pleasurable afternoons on the roof of the house driving golf ball after golf ball toward the Hill.

I am proud to have been a part of the Greek tradition at Georgia Tech. It's a tradition that has existed at Georgia Tech almost as long as the Institute itself. In fact, you might be interested to know that the brothers of ATO put their bid in for a charter before the Institute even officially opened its doors. By 1900, four more fraternities had joined ATO on the campus—Sigma Nu, Kappa Sigma, Kappa Alpha, and Sigma Alpha Epsilon.

Sororities came a little later—1953. The first sorority on the campus was Tau Sigma—a local colony of Alpha Xi Delta. The second sorority on campus, Alpha Gamma Delta, didn't arrive until 1972.

The first African-American fraternity, Omega Psi Phi, was chartered here in 1976 and the first African-American sorority, Delta Sigma Theta, in 1978.

Today, there's a total of 32 fraternities on the campus and 8 sororities.

The first effort to bring all of the Greek clubs under one umbrella organization occurred in 1914. In that year, the Panhellenic Council was formed, consisting of 12 campus fraternities. In 1924, the name was changed to Interfraternity Council to reflect its all-male population. In 1972, the sororities were admitted to the Interfraternity Council—and then in 1977, the sororities achieved a Council of their own when the Panhellenic Council was revived.

Through the years, some of Tech's most famous and accomplished students have participated in the Greek experience. For example, Gil Amelio, the new chairman and chief executive officer of Apple Computer was a member of Pi Kappa Alpha; Shirley Mewborn, treasurer of Southern Engineering Company was the president and treasurer of Alpha Xi Delta; Pete Silas, former chairman and CEO of Phillips Petroleum was a Phi Delta Theta; and astronaut John Young—the first man to fly into space six times and the current special assistant to the director of

NASA was a Sigma Chi. Those are just a few of the many outstanding men and women who honed their skills while a member of Georgia Tech's Greek community.

I understand that your theme today is the importance of a united Greek community. It's an excellent theme—not just for today—but everyday. After all, when you joined your individual sorority or fraternity, you joined an organization dedicated to service, scholarship, and friendship. You also joined to be a part of a much larger community. All of the fraternities and sororities on this campus have that in common. Since you share those tenets, it should be easy to also share in a united system.

Of course that's easy for me to say.

But, I do know from experience that when you work together, more is accomplished. For example, I'd like to point to the campus-wide strategic plan. To create the plan, I worked with alumni, students, faculty, staff, and administrators. Committees were formed consisting of representatives from each area. These committees looked at strategic plans from each unit and made recommendations. Then, other diverse committees were formed to follow up on those recommendations—and come up with specific objectives for the future. The end result was a shared vision—and a strong plan for the future of the Institute.

Unity within Tech's Greek system is not just desirable—it's necessary to your survival. Through the years the number of students involved in Greek activities has

declined. Thirty years ago when I was a student, approximately 36 percent of the campus was Greek. In the mid-50s, that percentage was even higher. Today, it's more like 24 percent.

Although I'm not an expert in this area, if I had to hazard a guess as to the reasons behind the dropping numbers, I'd say there are more social outlets than there used to be. But, I'd also have to point to your reputations.

The hard truth is that—all over the U.S.—fraternities and sororities no longer have the reputation they once did. When the movies depict Greek life, they no longer show young men gulping goldfish, they now show young men and women draining beer after beer. Although you're still pledging faith to the same ideals of service, scholarship, and friendship—run-ins with the police, problems with drinking, litigation, even date rape—have damaged the public's perception of you.

Whatever the cause—Hollywood, the specter of litigation, real-life police situations, even the envy of those not within your system—maybe all of those reasons together—have undermined the positive force the Greek system could—and should be.

Unfortunately, the bad news is what makes news. For example, as I'm sure you know, it's virtually impossible to get the news media to cover a service project, however, if a member of a sorority or fraternity was drinking and fell from a rooftop—news vans would be all over the campus.

Likewise, you're committed to scholarship, service, and friendship—but what the public remembers is your parties.

When preparing for this speech, I went over some of our campus statistics. As a group, the Greek system invests more time in community service activities than any other group on campus. Just off the top of my head, I can think of three wonderful service projects initiated by individual fraternities and sororities: the People Understanding the Severely Handicapped service activities undertaken by Pi Kappa Phi, Alpha Phi Alpha's involvement with the Cub Scouts, and Phi Mu's fundraiser for the Children's Miracle Network, Shoot Two for Phi Mu. Those are just three. I could name at least 37 more worthwhile philanthropies.

I also have some statistics from an ongoing Georgia Tech study. According to this study, sorority members earned a higher GPA and were more likely to graduate than female students not involved in a sorority. Likewise, fraternity members not only have a higher GPA than those not involved in a fraternity, but non-fraternity individuals are more than twice as likely to drop out or leave Georgia Tech.

As an administrator, I've found that I can always call on the campus Greeks to get an honest student opinion or to help with a campus-wide event or initiative. I know that many of you were very involved with the push for a Student Honor Code. Many of you also participate in

Student Government and other campus clubs and activities. Most of you do not confine yourself exclusively to Greek life.

As you can see, you all have much to be proud of. And, your raucous, party-hearty reputation is an exaggeration. The result of too many people who've seen too many reruns of Animal House or Revenge of the Nerds Part 7.

However, there is a grain of truth within those exaggerations and that's what hurts you.

Obviously, it's not fair. All suffer for the mistakes of a few.

It's unity of a sort—but probably not the kind you are looking for.

So what's the answer? How do you rise above the hype and become recognized for what you do everyday—rather than the isolated incidents?

The first answer is obvious. Avoid isolated incidents. Your actions affect your entire fraternity and sorority. They also affect the entire system—and I'm not just talking about the Greek system. These incidents also affect the Georgia Tech system—as well as the University System of Georgia.

This is a lesson Georgia Tech's Greeks have learned the hard way.

The second answer lies with your theme today: unity.

As Lyndon Johnson once said: “There are no problems we cannot solve together, and very few that we can solve by ourselves.”

By working together, you can strengthen the Greek system, the Georgia Tech, community—even the University System of Georgia.

How can you achieve unity and strength? There’s no easy answer, but I think it all goes back to your system-wide ideals of service, scholarship, and friendship. When you work together—pushing those themes—you can change the way you are viewed and become a stronger force on campus. You can become an example for the rest of the campus.

You’ve already got the raw materials. Today, we’ve talked a little bit about your strengths and the benefits you bring to the campus.

Now, it’s up to you to use those raw materials. It’s up to you to demonstrate what you can accomplish with your shared strength.

And, I, for one, look forward to seeing it.

Thank you.