

FRATERNITIES AT SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY

With the development of Simon Fraser University as a society, a number of issues have arisen within the student body which undoubtedly concern the academic governing body of Simon Fraser University. North American universities in general have some peculiarities with regards to student societies and among these is the prevalence of societies classified as social fraternities and sororities. The University of British Columbia for instance is "blessed" with a very liberal number of student fraternities and sororities. It is now quite evident that there are elements in the student body at Simon Fraser University who would wish to emulate this type of society. Since the fraternities and sororities at most universities are implicitly recognized by the governing body of the university it is obviously a very considerable importance to Simon Fraser that this subject be given ample thought before a similar position is taken by the Senate of Simon Fraser University.

Since the University community as such is a very special fraternity in itself, one would enquire whether the formation of social fraternities among the student body can really add anything that might be of value and contribute to the general structure of the student body. If not, what might be some negative effects. In order to answer such a question it is necessary to assess the usefulness of such organizations at other campuses. It is indeed interesting to note that the University of Victoria student body does not have the fraternity-sorority system. There are a number of other rather notable examples in Canadian universities in which a similar situation exists. Queen's University, University of Calgary and the University of Saskatchewan (both campuses) do not have fraternities and sororities. There must be

good reason why these institutions have not followed the general pattern as is present in north American universities. It is particularly interesting to note in this connection that Stanford University officials felt some time ago that the time had approached in which sororities as such could not be allowed to exist on campus. Considering then the existence of large numbers of fraternities and sororities in the United States universities, this action by Stanford University was obviously a very drastic step taken by a governing body of a university. Undoubtedly Stanford officials had some very valid reasons why this was done.

One of the primary arguments advanced by proponents of fraternity and sorority systems as to why such organizations should exist, with recognition of the university, concerns the rather nebulous concept in that these organizations foster student participation in various campus activities and give the students who belong to these organizations a "feeling of belonging to the university community". If such is the case, I suggest that this function of sororities and fraternities has failed miserably on most campuses where these exist. For instance, during my own attendance on the university campus at Saskatoon, I was amazed at the degree of student participation in various campus activities. An 80% turnout at the polls when new officers of the student governing body were elected was not unusual and on occasions this figure rose to over 90% when contentious issues were debated. It is to be noted that the University of Saskatchewan has no fraternities and sororities. In striking contrast, during my attendance on the campus of the University of British Columbia it was considered a tremendous turnout if 25% (more usually it was 15-20%) of the student body would come out to vote in similar "elections". As mentioned previously, the University

of British Columbia student body is liberally endowed with fraternities and sororities. The University of Minnesota, which is also blessed with a liberal number of social fraternities could do no better than University of British Columbia while the writer was in attendance there. Since these organizations are primarily concerned with so-called social functions of the student body it seems very questionable that they be located on a university campus or for that matter, recognized since surely a university is primarily concerned with academic education of students, and not the sponsorship of various highly exclusive social clubs. A further question which one must ask is how desirable are the "social activities" of these organizations. Here again the answers are mostly negative. The experiences by councillors at Stanford University with respect to the psychological impact of the rushing procedures in sororities eventually led them to abolish sororities on campus. It turns out that admission to sororities is based primarily on social status and the effects of not being admitted to a particular sorority because of financial background or social status, race, religion, etc., had tremendous psychological effects on the female student body. In other words the sorority system or the fraternity system then is very exclusive in many aspects. The general history of the fraternity movement taken as a whole in the United States and, for that matter, Canada, is certainly not a very bright story to read. If the University as such recognizes officially such organizations on campus they then also implicitly recognize some of the discrimination clauses which have existed in the so-called "constitutions" of the various fraternities for decades. It is amazing to learn that many of these discriminatory clauses with respect to religion, race, social and economic background, etc., have not been removed from these "constitutions" in spite of the fact that various

universities have repeatedly requested those fraternal organizations to do so, certainly they have had ample time to effect this.

Fraternal organizations on campus are a highly knit group. This carries with itself some imminent dangers with respect to proper and representative functioning of general societies or governing bodies within a student body. If one takes the trouble to analyse the effect that highly organized fraternities have on student activities it is invariably found that such officers as president of students council and other subsidiary offices within a student council are almost always occupied by specific fraternal members. This in itself is highly undesirable since it can easily lead to a direct expression of the philosophy of a fraternal organization as such and not a true expression of the general student body. A few rather specific examples will further clarify this contention. It was the experience, for instance, at the University of Saskatchewan that presentations of student operettas, plays, etc., were entirely accomplished through auditioning. This procedure was well advertised in advance and any member of the student body was more than welcome to audition for the various leading and minor roles. This, of course, is as it should be. In contrast, at another university engaging in similar activities, it became very evident that such auditions were not at all well publicized and the one or two individuals who did somehow manage to audition for a leading part in an operetta, were never informed as to the outcome of those auditions. In the final analysis the complete production was not a production of the student body as such but was a production of a particular fraternity who happened to have a strangle-hold on the administration of the musical society. It is interesting to note that the "outside" auditioners had in fact competed in provincial musical festivals and had walked off with the highest honors. I might cite another example which serves to illustrate the glaring misuse that is made of student organizations which are operated

"for the student body as a whole". This example concerns the operation of an undergraduate athletic committee. The purpose of a particular function was to select students who would represent the university at an interuniversity athletic competition. Obviously the proper way of conducting such an elimination would be to adequately advertise that trials would be held and the student body would be fully aware of where and when eliminations would take place. Again in this case provincial champions who were not associated with any fraternities or sororities and who were very interested in competing could for some reason or another not discover when these trials would be held in spite of repeated enquiries. In due time, of course, these "trials" had been held, known to no-one but some few select members of a fraternal and sorority organization, and the representatives were "chosen". This repeated itself both in the case of "selecting" a representative for the golfing team and for the badminton team.

It should be amply clear at this time that the functions of a fraternity are generally not in the best interests of the student body, or for that matter, the community. One needs only refer to some recent social developments which have such fraternities in our general geographic area in a very bad light. The fact that two University of British Columbia students who were members of one of the most select fraternities were killed in an automobile accident on University Boulevard and the fact that both individuals were under the very decided influence of alcohol and the fact that both individuals were minors points a very condemning finger at the fraternity concerned. A study of this particular case and many others brings to the surface very undesirable features. A University administration as such can hardly wash their hands of such an instance when such fraternities are given implicit recognition; to try to do so

completely evades the issue at hand. It is common that fraternity houses "in some way or manner" are able to obtain liquor licences for the dispensing of alcoholic beverages within the premises. It is fantastic how such a licence can be justifiably granted to such organizations when the majority of inhabitants of these houses are minors. A University administration that gives official recognition to such fraternal bodies is then in effect contributing to the delinquency of minors and is therefore as guilty as the parties immediately concerned with the serving of intoxicating beverages to minors. With specific references to some recent issues of Simon Fraser University newspaper it contained a number of short articles concerned with the formation of fraternities association with Simon Fraser University. Here again a very clear issue arises in that these fraternal organizations wish to have a licence to serve alcoholic beverages in spite of the fact that most of the members would be minors. It should be reiterated then that formal recognition by the University of such fraternal organizations carries with it an implicit recognition that such an organization can and will in fact dispense liquor to minors. This is most certainly a deplorable practice in existing fraternal societies and must be avoided. It is therefore well advised that Simon Fraser University deal with the question of fraternities and sororities in a similar manner as did Victoria University, University of Saskatchewan, Queen's University, etc., and for that matter Stanford University, that is, such fraternal organizations will not be given recognition by Simon Fraser University nor would they be allowed to exist as "influential bodies" at Simon Fraser University or masquerade as Simon Fraser University fraternities. This does not of course mean that the students are not free to independently organize whatever fraternal society they wish to organize,

but if they do, they do so entirely on their own and will not receive the official recognition of Simon Fraser University in any form or manner.

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