

Greek Organizations Address

February 20, 2005

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Good evening. I address you this evening wearing three hats. As the president of your University. As a fellow citizen of the communities of our University and our host city, Chico. And as a fellow Greek - Sigma Phi Epsilon, North Carolina Lambda.

Wearing each of these hats, I am not here to give a lecture, or to preach a sermon, or to deliver a warning. Rather, I am here to tell you how it is.

This is how it is. Matthew Carrington's senseless, tragic death is the last straw in the University's experience in dealing with the conditions and behaviors which contributed to it. Although such conditions and behaviors are not a monopoly of the Greek organizations of our campus, they are, fairly or not, accurately or not, largely attributed to these organizations and its membership - you.

The University has no intention of waiting around for another tragic incident, another abusive act, another hurtful, thoughtless event to occur before declaring what its position is in these matters and what its actions will be. So let me be very clear about this position that now guides our actions as never before:

You are either part of the solution - collectively and every day - or you are part of the problem. You are either part of a problem to be eliminated, or you are a partner to be engaged in finding solutions.

It is your choice, but there's no room for ambiguity. You're either one or you're the other.

But let me continue to be frank with you, in case my words have not been clear enough.

You really don't have any choice in this matter if you expect the Greek system to survive here. And that's not simply because the University will enforce its code of conduct. It is because you will and must enforce your own.

Your charters, your purposes, your very names in what those Greek letters stand for proclaim compelling values: friendship, unity, respect, dignity, service, citizenship, leadership, integrity.

Integrity. Are you who you say you are, or does your behavior, by harming and humiliating others, proclaim you to be something else? Do your actions shout so loudly that we cannot hear what you say? If you are not true to your own self-professed ideals and standards, then you have lost your integrity and forfeited your credibility. If you are not whom you claim to be, then you are frauds. And there is no place here for those who do not live by their own promises.

If, however, you embrace and enact your own values and virtues then you might still have a chance to earn the opportunity to be here. Not simply because your behavior and reputation would improve, but because you would align yourselves more closely with the goals and purposes of the University itself. And none of these goals and purposes are more important than creating a safe, supportive, civil and respectful living and learning environment that fosters student success.

We are all privileged to be here - from the youngest freshman to the most senior faculty, from a part-time lab technician to the president. We all have responsibilities to one another, we all have expectations of one another, and we all have expectations of ourselves.

You are in organizations meant to mirror this larger framework. Belonging is a privilege; responsibility is mutual; benefits are expected. And most of you embrace positively the privilege and promise of brotherhood and sisterhood. But some of you do not.

Accordingly, I have directed Vice President for Student Affairs Jim Moon and his leadership team, assisted by others throughout the University, including representatives of the Greek system, to undertake immediately a thorough review of the entire system. Everything is on the table in this review - from leadership development to membership behavior, from social responsibility to community service, from rush practices to the very fact of the Greek system's continued existence on this campus. I have asked that this review be completed before the end of the spring semester.

This review will be open-ended. There are no predetermined outcomes to it. But there are definitely predetermined goals: If we continue to have fraternities and sororities at Chico State, they must reflect the self-professed and admirable ideals of those organizations and they must be aligned unequivocally with the core values and necessary expectations of the University itself. And these - let me reiterate - are community, civility, respect, service, tolerance and integrity.

As a Greek, you will find that no one celebrates more strongly than I what you can be - and that no one will hold you accountable more strongly than I will. And you will find no one more willing than I to take your hand in partnership if you live up to the promises you have made to each other and to this University community.

I expect you to accept this offer and the promise of a stronger, safer and more compassionate University that comes with it. A prouder, better University that we will build together.

I await your decision, your resolve, and your proof to get on with what we must and can do together.

Thank you.