

Recruitment Through the years

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In order for anything to stay current and relevant, things must change based on research and new information. The processes and procedures surrounding how we recruit and select new members is the perfect example of an ever-evolving program to ensure our sisterhood is steadfast and strong for years to come. Join us on this brief overview through the years as we recount just how much recruitment has transformed to fit Kappa Alpha Theta's and our members' needs accordingly.

1870-1890 1870-1890: PERSON TO PERSON

With Theta's founding in 1870, the founders reached out to fellow female students they knew who would make good additions to the new organization. Members of Alpha/DePauw expanded the Fraternity's reach by using personal connections at other institutions. This person-to-person connection through family or friends allowed Kappa Alpha Theta to grow beyond DePauw University and into what we know today.

Per our Constitution in 1870, our requirements for membership at this time were simple: *No one shall be admitted without the full and free consent of all the members. No one can become a member of this society unless she has been a student at the university or college at least six months and during that time sustained a good moral character, evinced a social disposition, and received a high standing in her studies. No one can become a member of this society who has been a member of a similar secret order.*

By the 1890s, increasing numbers of female college students and women's fraternities and sororities on campuses created competition for members and groups developed structures to govern the recruitment process in both informal and formal ways.



"BETTIE LOCKE WAS REQUESTED TO SOUND ELLA SLOAN AND IF THE WAY SEEMED CLEAR MAKE HER A PROPOSITION. ... VIRGINIA (HANNAH) WAS INSTRUCTED TO SPEAK TO FLORA TURMAN IN THE SAME WAY.."

Alpha Chapter minutes, November 5, 1870



Mary Stephenson Buchtel was Alpha Chapter's first initiate after the founders in March 1870. Typically, the member would be asked and then initiated with a very short period of time.

1900-1920s

1900-1920S: THE ESTABLISHMENT OF FORMAL RUSH

With the advent of the new century and the formation of the National Panhellenic Conference (NPC) in 1902, “rush,” or what we now call recruitment, becomes much more organized. “Rush” most likely derives from activities as early as the 1850s when upperclassmen would rush to get to know new students, often arriving at the local train station and claiming them for their campus social groups. As rush became more formalized, college chapters created a position called “rush captain” as early as 1903. As collegians moved from campus to campus starting in 1914, the Fraternity formally supported affiliation stating that “...any Theta is entitled to active membership in any college chapter (active or alumnae), if she qualifies for active membership.”

During this time, processes and procedures around rush became more standard across chapters. Ballot boxes using black and white balls were mandated by Theta’s Constitution; each member voted on a potential new member (PNM) by submitting a white or black ball in secret. This method of voting was widely used by secret organizations of all types and the term “blackballing” derives from this process.

By the 1920s, formal recommendations, or “rush blanks,” were regularly shared with alumnae through various means. The Fraternity published its first “rushing manual” during this time, as well. The formalization of rush called for limiting the size of the pledge class and the beginning of utilizing skits during rush for entertainment. Grade requirements started to appear from the National Panhellenic Conference (NPC), universities, and within chapter-governing documents.

It wasn’t until 1914 that Theta addressed the concept of “relatives,” the term use at the time for legacies. While there was no stated limit on who could become a member, rush blanks did ask about religious affiliation and the father’s name and occupation. While the selection of new members was filtered through the recommendation system, membership selection was ultimately up to the chapter and a few members of marginalized identities were recorded to become Thetas around this time.*

“...[E]XPENSIVE AND PUBLIC RUSHING IS NOTHING MORE THAN FLAUNTING OURSELVES IN HOSTILE EYES IS HARD TO BELIEVE. ...[A]LL PUBLIC DISPLAYS SIMPLY INVITE CRITICISM, SARCASM, AND HARD FEELING. IF ALL ENTERTAINING COULD BE MADE MORE NATURAL, A GREAT FORWARD STEP WOULD HAVE BEEN MADE... THE OBJECT OF ALL RUSHING IS TO GET ACQUAINTED – NEW GIRLS TO MEET THE ONES IN COLLEGE AND VICE VERSA. ELIZABETH PHILLIPS, ST. LOUIS ALUMNAE”
Kappa Alpha Theta Magazine, March 1916



From 1909 until at least 1948, Thetas voted using a ballot box with black and white balls. Used for secrecy in voting, a white ball was used to vote yes and a black ball to vote no.

1930s-1960s

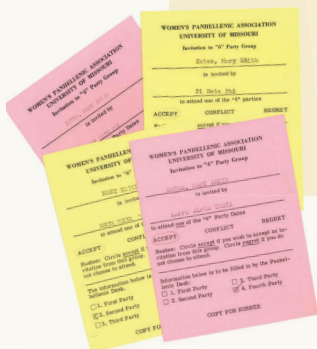
1930S-1960S: MID-CENTURY RECRUITMENT

The development of active alumnae input into the rush process began in the 1920s and became standardized in the entirety of the process. An alumna member was included on chapter rush committees.

Recommendations continued to become more formalized with the introduction of the rush recommendation boards (RRBs), a group of alumnae who served a particular geographic area and provided recommendations from the area to college chapters.

In 1958, a proposal to require recommendations for membership in the Fraternity was passed by a vote of the Grand Convention body, codifying the practice that had been in place since at least the 1920s.

During the post-World War II period, greater recognition of inequity in all levels of education led to questioning the student organizations and their membership selection policies. Student organizations were pressured to ensure discrimination was not written into their policies and procedures. As campus environments changed, the call for Theta to adapt grew louder.



“HEAVEN FORBID THAT WE EVER REACH THE STAGE OF BEING AN IBM MACHINE, WHERE WE PUT IN A CARD WITH THE NAME OF A CITY, AN AREA IN A CITY, A GIRL’S NAME WITH THE COLOR OF HER HAIR AND HER SKIN, WITH HER WEIGHT AND HEIGHT, HER GRADES— AND THEN PUSH A LEVER AND EXPECT TO PULL OUT A FRIEND. WE CANNOT DETERMINE, OR SHOULD I SAY PRE-DETERMINE, WHO WILL MEET OUR QUALIFICATIONS AND STANDARDS WHEN WE DON’T EVEN KNOW WHO WILL BE GOING TO WHAT COLLEGE.”
Virginia S. Edwards, Alpha Tau/Cincinnati, May 21, 1964

1959-1960 rush cards for Mary Edith Estes Arnold, Alpha Mu/Missouri.

1970s-1980s

1970S-1980S: THE CONTEXT OF RECRUITMENT CHANGES

Animal House was released in 1978 and instantly defined fraternity life differently both for society and for fraternity and sorority members alike.

Rush and sorority membership continued to grow throughout the 1970s and 1980s because of and in spite of popular culture. Theta published a detailed recruitment manual and other supporting materials to assist college chapters and skit guides based upon ideas from chapters.

Theta moved forward on its understanding of diversity; Theta's elected leaders pushed the Fraternity to understand our place in the larger global world. Chapters, reflecting their own campus environments, selected members that included women of minoritized identities but did come up against preconceived notions of who could be a Theta from others in the organization.*

"[THETA] IS AND ALWAYS HAS BEEN A SUPPORT SYSTEM, A SISTERHOOD OF LOVE AND FRIENDSHIP. AS OUR YOUNG PEOPLE GROW UP IN THIS ETHNICALLY DIVERSE WORLD, THEY MAKE FRIENDS FROM ALL RACES, AND THEY BELIEVE THESE FRIENDS SHOULD BE WELCOMED BY EVERYONE AS SISTERS. MANY OF YOU WOULD AGREE. HOWEVER, ALL OF US MUST COME TO GRIPS WITH THE CHANGING FACE OF AMERICA IF KAPPA ALPHA THETA IS TO REMAIN IN THE FOREFRONT OF WOMEN'S ORGANIZATIONS, WHERE I FIRMLY BELIEVE IT BELONGS."

Sue Supple, Alpha/DePauw, Former Fraternity President

"Message from the President," *Kappa Alpha Theta Magazine*, Spring 1987



Gamma Delta/Georgia, 1987

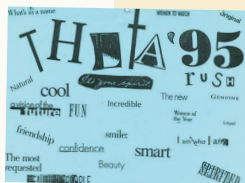
1990s-2010s

1990S-2010S: VALUES-BASED RECRUITMENT

During this time, the language we used about membership selection began to change. "Rush" became "recruitment," a "rushee" was now a "potential new member" (PNM), and the term "values-based recruitment" was introduced to move the process away from the negative practices of earlier decades.

For Theta, this meant the introduction of the weighted ranking system and scaling back requirements for recommendations. In the weighted ranking system, each PNM receives a score that uses the formula of the first impression score plus the yardstick score. These scores are then organized in descending order. Per a vote of the Grand Convention body in 2010, recommendations were no longer required for membership moving forward.

The rise of social media influenced college chapters to compete with other campus groups, even while leaders pushed for more values-based recruitment efforts to limit frills like skits and exorbitant budgets.



"SO NOW LET'S TALK ABOUT WOMEN, BECAUSE TODAY'S WORLD INCLUDES AN ONGOING DIALOGUE ABOUT GENDER IDENTITY, AND IF WE ARE TO REMAIN RELEVANT AND TO IDENTIFY MEMBERS ACCORDING TO GENDER, WE MUST FIND OUR PLACE IN THAT DISCUSSION. AND SO, RESPONDING TO CALLS FROM OUR COLLEGE CHAPTERS WHO ARE REGULARLY CONFRONTED WITH THE ISSUE OF WHAT THAT MEANS, WE HAVE CLARIFIED THAT ALL WHO IDENTIFY AS WOMEN ARE ELIGIBLE AS WOMEN FOR MEMBERSHIP."

Laura Ware Doerre, Delta Xi/North Carolina, Former Fraternity President

"State of the Fraternity 2015," *Kappa Alpha Theta Magazine*, Spring/Summer 2016

A couple of supporting rush materials from the early 1990s.

2020s

TODAY

A decade that started with a global pandemic completely changed the way we interacted with each other and has defined a beginning of change to the recruitment process once again.

In the summer of 2020, the Abolish Greek Life (AGL) movement arose on campuses across the United States, calling for the abolition of historically white fraternities and sororities. These movements involved dedicated Instagram accounts and led to several chapters experiencing resignations, but also led to a renewed focus on membership selection practices.

Under this renewed focus and in looking to become a more inclusive space, Theta moved away from preferential treatment for legacies and revamped the optional recommendation process. The Potential New Member Introduction Form—still optional—is welcomed from any person, regardless of Greek affiliation, to inform chapters of the individual interested in becoming a member of Theta.

The future of recruitment will continue to evolve as organizations and their members learn, grow, and move forward. While much has changed, Theta will continue to recruit members who will uphold the high ideals of this organization.

"OUR COLLEGE CHAPTER MEMBERS HAVE SHOWN US THAT THEY CAN DO IT, AND WE ARE CONFIDENT THEY WILL CARRY ON IN RECRUITING EVEN MORE SMART, LOVING, AND HARDWORKING MEMBERS."

Christine McDonald, Psi/Wisconsin, Recruitment Committee Chairman
"The Current State of Recruitment," *Kappa Alpha Theta Magazine*, Winter 2021



Delta Omega/Texas A&M

*Identifying members of marginalized identities is a challenging process as Theta did not record members' ethnicities nor religious affiliations. We rely on self-identification by our members. We continue to welcome information about these important parts of our history.