

# Words of Advice from a Departing Consul

Dear Incoming Consul:

The role of the Consul is incredibly challenging, fun, stressful, time-consuming, and rewarding. The role is liberating; as you have the power to realize your wildest dreams for your chapter. Along with this power comes tremendous responsibility, so much that it can feel constricting. You will have to make an incredible amount of personal sacrifices throughout the year. You will give everything you have for the house, stay sober often when everyone around you is not, be a role model, refrain from decisions with repercussions that could reflect poorly on the house, put your obligations before the desires of your closest friends, make unpopular decisions, and explain those decisions to brothers who sometimes won't listen. You will not please everyone. But remember that if everybody is content, then you probably aren't doing your job. By the end of your term, you will probably be exhausted and perhaps ready for the end. Hopefully, you will have given every ounce of energy you had to Sigma Chi. You will have pushed yourself harder than ever before, and you will look back on the entire experience as one that made you and the chapter better for it.

One of the most challenging aspects of the Consul role is the transition period. You will be entrusted with a role that you can't really understand until the year starts. Then, all of a sudden, something—be it the first unregistered party, a fight between brothers, a problem with the police or another Fraternity, etc.—will trigger the realization that the amount of responsibility that you now have to the house is virtually incomprehensible. The responsibility for every single thing that the house does, or fails to do, rests ultimately with you. This guide should help you get a picture of what to expect and what you need to do so you can *hit the ground running* and have the most effective and rewarding experience possible. It begins with a timeline of the beginning of the school year, and then becomes more general. After a few weeks of being in the role, you'll pretty much be able to figure out what is required of you as the year goes on.

Remember, this guide is not perfect nor is it exhaustive. Small parts of it may not even apply to your chapter. That's OK. Remember, you will learn the great majority of what you need to know simply by being thrown into the position. You might need to take different approaches than those advised in this guide. Totally unexpected situations will arise that simply are impossible to plan for. No matter what happens, at the end of the day, trust your gut. You were elected for a reason and your judgment is sound. I know you will not only do a fantastic job leading your chapter, but you will also take Sigma Chi, as a whole, to new levels of success.

In Hoc Signo Vincas,

Outgoing Consul

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## Guide to the Consul Position

### Before taking office:

- Learn as much as you can from the outgoing Consul. Go with him to an Inter-Fraternity Council meeting and introduce yourself to the other presidents. Together, drop by the Office of Greek Life and begin fostering a relationship with them. Try to introduce yourself to as many administrators, Greek Life officials, and other relevant parties who have any sort of influence on Greek Life as you possibly can. Explain to all of them how excited you are for the position, how committed you are to maintaining and building upon the progress of the chapter, and how you'd like to work *with* them to make Greek Life even better. These conversations and new relationships can pay huge dividends later in the year. Make a good impression and maintain your relationships by regularly checking in.

### Summer (Pre-BLTW):

- Prepare for BLTW. Ensure that all the necessary officers have registered ([www.sigmachibltw.org](http://www.sigmachibltw.org)), and make sure that each participant has a means of transportation to and from the workshop. Also, ensure that all chapter finances are in order ahead of time. Occasionally, paperwork gets mishandled by your chapter or by Sigma Chi, so be sure that your Quaestor knows exactly how much money you owe or don't owe to Sigma Chi. Mistakes can take a long time to get sorted out, so it is better to take care of this in advance.

### Summer (BLTW):

- Have a great time at BLTW! This is a fantastic experience, and will be the most productive and effective training and planning session you will have. Have fun, but be sure you get everything you can out of it. Probably the best insight you will glean into the Consul position will be from your Consul's group. One of the best things about BLTW is simply getting ideas from other chapters throughout the whole workshop. Keep a notebook and pen with you at all times and have a page dedicated to great ideas for brotherhood events, social events, and other advice from other chapters. The BLTW schedule includes planned time for you to set goals with your other chapter officers. Take this time to heart. Really think about what you hope to accomplish, what you hope to change, what ideas you'd like to see set in place. BLTW will train you as a leader and will help you plan for the year.

### Summer (Post-BLTW):

- Meet with the Chapter Advisor. Explain your personal goals for the chapter as well as the goals you developed with your fellow officers at BLTW. Talk about his ideas for the upcoming year. Have him explain his expectations of you, and explain your expectations of him. Remember throughout the year, if you need him to do something he's not doing, just tell him. You have to trust yourself and be prepared to follow your gut, even if it entails telling an older alumni that he needs to do something differently.
- Meet with the sweetheart. See what she wants to get out of the year. What do you

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want her role to be in relation to the chapter? Do you have a goal for her? Your sweetheart might not have any idea what to do. If she is stuck, have her get in touch with the last sweetheart to brainstorm ideas. You might consider having her write a one page letter to the chapter outlining her goals for the year and what it means to her to be the sweetheart. If you decide to do this, have her handwrite the letter (or at least hand-sign and date it). Have her also provide you with an 8x10 picture of herself. Once you have both the letter and picture, frame them and hang them up in your chapter house. With each year, you can hang these two items next to that of the previous year. Pretty soon you will have a wall with pictures and letters from each sweetheart.

- Meet with any brother who wants to discuss the year, particularly brothers who were nominated for Consul and didn't win. They were nominated by the chapter because the chapter sees them as great leaders, so make sure that they have the opportunity to express to you their goals and do your best to utilize their advice and consul throughout the year.
- Memorize the duties for your office as prescribed by the Ritual, and memorize everything necessary for the chapter meeting.
- Email every brother and collect their individual goals, chapter goals, changes needed in the chapter, event ideas, and what role they expect to play within the house. Combine the answers anonymously and present a hand-signed copy as a *Guide to Success* to each brother at the first chapter meeting. Use this as a resource throughout the year. Constantly refer back to it and see if you are meeting your goals. Also, refer to the *Guide to Success* from the year before, because the event ideas, changes needed, and goals may still be relevant.

## Just Before the Start of the School Year:

**House Meeting:** If you are fortunate enough to have a chapter house, set the tone and expectations for the house early. Ensure that brothers recognize the expectations of behavior in the house right from the start. Consider having each brother sign a contract with house expectations. In other chapters, contracts like these have proved to be critical in the event of disciplinary problems. Consult with the previous and current officers for any changes. Every brother must sign it.

**Pre-Classes Partying:** Everyone comes back to the school excited for the year to begin. This is a great time of catching up with old friends, enjoying the lack of work, and enjoying the good weather. Have fun, but know that people will come back to school and want to celebrate hard. This is a risky time for the house, because people will have been away from school and the rules that we must follow for over three months. Guard the house. Make sure that people make safe decisions that don't jeopardize themselves, those around them, or our house. Watch out especially for freshmen, many of whom are not familiar with the college social atmosphere. Make sure that music is off at a reasonable time. If there is no required quiet time set by your university, set outdoor and indoor music cutoff time(s) for the entire year. This can make your life a whole lot easier when people are trying to blare outdoor music late at night, when brothers in the house are trying to sleep, and when you don't want to attract negative attention to the house. In addition, you don't want to have bad relationships with your neighbors and you don't want to put the house at risk for getting in trouble. Most brothers don't recognize the potential risks that something as seemingly innocuous as loud music introduces to the

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house. You have to be comfortable with being the guy who turns off music late at night when there might be fifty people at the house having a good time (though you should be able to depend on your Pro Consul, Centurion, and House Manager, as well). Sigma Chi always comes first. Setting a standard cutoff time would definitely make it easier because the brothers would already know what time the music ends and would have no reason to complain. Consider including music guidelines in the house expectations contract.

**First Chapter Meeting:** Plan your first chapter meeting down to a tee, even doing a practice run with the old executive officers. The old officers will begin the first meeting, and as the first order of business will swear you in. After you and your fellow officers read your duties, you will be officially installed as the new officers. Be *sure* that you have the Charge fully memorized. It is quite an experience to deliver the charge to the chapter, and this will be the moment they are waiting for. Demonstrating to them that you are prepared for the role will give them confidence in you as a leader, and will give you that much more of a reason to command respect. But, at the same time, not everything will go smoothly. You'll have some hiccups and that's OK, too. They understand that you are new at it.

*Once you have reached this point, you will have a very good grasp of what your new position entails. You will be getting all kinds of emails with things you need to do, forms that need to be filled out, etc. This portion of the guide provides you with more general advice as you lead the chapter throughout the year.*

## Being a Role Model to the Chapter and Those Outside of It

You are now the face of the Fraternity. Everything you do reflects directly on Sigma Chi and your chapter. People both inside the chapter and outside of it will expect you to be a model member of the chapter. Accordingly, engaging in behavior that could get you in trouble with the local police, with the university, or with the community around you will send a message to the chapter that breaking rules is acceptable, and will send a message to those outside of the Fraternity that our Fraternity and chapter endorses behavior that directly goes against the policies to which we voluntarily subscribe. The chapter, Sigma Chi, and the university place an incredible amount of trust in you. The minute you lose the trust of the university, the entire credibility of the chapter is lost. By personally engaging in acts common on a college campus that break rules (e.g. using a fake ID, smoking marijuana, plagiarism) you break the trust of not only the active brothers, but also the administration and all of the brothers who came before you who put their hearts and souls into the house. Model the way for the rest of the chapter. Be at every chapter event. Live the Ritual in your daily life. Those around you will be impressed, inspired, and energized by your sacrifices, and you and the chapter will be better for it.

## Fostering and Maintaining Key Relationships

**Greek Life:** This is a great time to make a lasting impression on the entire Office of

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Greek Life staff as well as the rest of the Greek Presidents and the leaders of IFC and Panhellenic. Right from the start, be a leader of the entire group of Fraternity Presidents. Be *extra* positive, do more than your fair share to help out, build relationships with everyone around you, and be the one to establish a vision for what Greek Life can accomplish if it works together toward a common goal.

**The Local or University Police Department:** Be proactive and get to know the officers who regularly interact with the Fraternity houses or your neighborhood. Demonstrate that you and your chapter are upstanding men who know how to have fun without crossing the line. Building a positive relationship in the beginning of the year can pay enormous dividends later in the year in the event of an unfortunate situation. Usually police officers have an array of options at their disposal when they are called to a location. If you have good relationships with the officers, they will be much less inclined to get the house (or members of it) in trouble, and they will be much more likely to give you a *heads up* instead of a citation. Be sure you introduce yourself and explain that you are the President of the house each time you see them. Ask them for help with your risk management procedures or have them make a safety presentation for the chapter. Many brothers might not realize the power of these relationships and see the police as an opposing force. Do not be discouraged in your efforts to build relationships..

- **The Administration:** On most campuses, there is a Dean, Chancellor, or Director of Greek Life who has near-absolute power over Greek Life. Find out who this person is and develop a positive relationship with them as soon as possible. Differentiate yourself from other leaders on campus. Show him or her that you are not only dedicated to improving your own chapter but also improving Greek Life as a whole. You might be surprised at what outcomes this relationship can bring. Often times, this person will come to you when he or she needs a student opinion on a high-impact decision.
- **Alumni:** Be sure you maintain relationships with chapter alumni and alumni who live in the region. Develop a close working relationship with your Chapter Advisor, your house corporation, and any other relevant alumni or alumni boards. Listen to their opinions, concerns, and suggestions. You don't have to adopt every idea or suggestion that is put forth to you, though it is likely that most of their suggestions will be extraordinarily valuable.
- **Other Greek Presidents:** Keep the relationships that you develop with other Presidents alive and well throughout the year. All of the Presidents have remarkably similar experiences. They go through much of the same problems that you do. They really are your allies throughout the year. Whenever there is a problem with another chapter, it is much easier to deal with if you already have a strong relationship with their leader. If another chapter or another chapter's members do something inappropriate that is not serious enough to report it to the university, deal with the President directly. Explain what happened and tell them what you want done because you know that the conduct was not conduct representative of the \_\_\_\_\_ Fraternity (Sorority). That being said, if there are repeated small, inappropriate actions by another chapter, or one big inappropriate action by a chapter, do not be afraid to bring the issue to the university's attention. Every chapter buys into the system and knows that there are repercussions for inappropriate actions that reflect poorly on Greek Life.

# Appendix A: Words of Advice from a Departing Consul

## Chapter Meetings

Prepare an agenda for every meeting. This should be done after the Executive Board meeting of the week and should be rechecked before the meeting to be updated with things that have come up since then. Refer to the agendas from the previous year (especially at the beginning of the year) to see what needs to take place when.

Start on time. From the beginning of the year, set the tone that chapter meetings will begin at the time that you say they will. If your meeting is set to start at 7:00, people will arrive at 7:03, and your meeting probably won't start until 7:07 at the earliest. When chapter meetings habitually start late, people habitually arrive even later. And, per the Ritual, late entrances really do disrupt the chapter meeting. So, you want to make sure that the meetings start on time. The only way to ensure that your chapter meetings start on time is to make sure you, your Pro Consul, your Annotator, and your Kustos arrive early. If these officers are not there, the meeting literally cannot begin. Stress to these officers at the beginning of the year the importance of coming on time and the chapter will quickly see the importance of being prompt.

The chapter meetings are an important time for the chapter. Showing up in gym shorts and a sloppy T-shirt sends a different message to the chapter than if you show up every week looking neat and presentable.

## Social Events

Most universities have strict policies about social events. Not following these policies and advertising unofficial events on Facebook or playing extraordinarily loud music runs the risk of getting your house and YOU in trouble. At parties at the house, it is important that you are sober so that you can deal with the police (who might ask to speak to you only), unruly guests, or brothers acting in a manner that puts Sigma Chi at risk. Unregistered parties often are a part of the collegiate social fabric, and are extremely hard to deal with in your position. (You want everyone to have a good time. At the same time, all of the responsibility for an event you know you aren't permitted to have falls upon you). Therefore, it would be important for you to have as many responsible officers at your side able to help you out should a problem arise—particularly the Pro Consul, Centurion, and House Manager.

## The Rush, Pledge, and Initiation Processes

Again and again you will be reminded that you are the face of the Fraternity. During the rush process, young students will be looking at you to see what a Sigma Chi looks like at its purest. Show them what an honor it is.

Bid acceptance can be a risky time. Remember that most of your pledges-to-be are freshmen. Also remember that freshmen can't handle their alcohol well. If there is going to be alcohol involved (Sigma Chi does not condone the use of alcohol by minors), look out for those who are drinking and make sure that nobody sick is left alone.

Once pledgship starts, discuss with your Magister the level of involvement he wants you to have in the weekly pledge meetings. Different chapters have different levels of involvement by the Consul. Do your best to be at any meeting the Magister asks you to be at. Be sure to give your Magister support and praise. His job often is as hard as yours. When the pledges have their first I-Week Meeting where implied silence is explained,

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have a letter prepared for them to give out when they leave the meeting (silently). In this letter, express how proud you are of them and how much opportunity the week holds for them. Stress that the more they put into it the more they will get out of it. Make sure that the I-Week Chairs have enough help for setup and takedown of all of the activities during I-Week. Be there to help and guide them as much as possible.

The Ceremonies of Initiation are incredible. They also require a great deal of planning. Be sure to coordinate at least one rehearsal, at least a couple of days before it happens so that you can ensure that everyone has their parts memorized and that everything runs smoothly. You have a very large amount of material to memorize, so start early and be sure that you have it down. Stumbling or forgetting lines will give the candidates a less than ideal experience.

Once Initiation takes place, brothers will want to celebrate. This is another risky night on which you will need to really watch over the house and particularly the new Initiates.

Be sure to write thank-you letters to all the alumni who came to Initiation and/or helped out. Also be sure to write a hand-signed letter of congratulations to the parents of all new Initiates.

Ensure that the Pro Consul coordinates Post Initiation Training and that the new Initiates complete their ritualistic obligations.

## **The End of Your Term**

Leading up to elections, talk with all of the nominees for the Consul position. Explain to them what the role entails, and give them an honest portrayal of is the position responsibilities. Throughout the year you should be collecting files, taking notes, and eventually adding on to this guide or making a guide of your own that will enable the smoothest transition possible. Imagine the potential benefit to the future of your chapter if every year the Consul updated this guide with information relevant to your chapter (e.g. names of people to know, specific policies of your school, due dates). Once a brother is elected to the Consul position, give him as much knowledge as you possibly can about the position.

Before the next group of officers starts, you should change the Officer Contact Info on the Sigma Chi website ([http://www.sigma-chi.net/\\_officerupdate](http://www.sigma-chi.net/_officerupdate)). This will ensure that each officer gets all the emails related to their position in a timely manner.

## **Final Words of Advice**

1. Responsibility for everything that the chapter does, or fails to do, rests with you.
2. The chapter trusts and believes in you.
3. Often the hardest decision to make is the right one.
4. Be totally honest with those around you and yourself.
5. Trust your gut.
6. Do more than your fair share of work.
7. Leave the chapter better than it was before, in every possible way.
8. Be positive.
9. Be-humble—it's not about you.

10. Congratulate brothers on their achievements.
11. Thank brothers when they put in hard work.
12. Not everybody will be happy—it's a good thing.
13. Good luck.

\*David Schlichter, Tau Tau, 2006-2007