

# DEI UPDATE: JANUARY 29, 2021

## THE ABOLISH GREEK LIFE MOVEMENT

During the committee's early months, the Abolish Greek Life movement took hold on more than a dozen campuses. The attacks on the Greek System, in general, and sometimes Chi Omega, specifically, were pointed and painful. It was difficult to be judged with broad strokes and hurtful language, and discouraging to read of members whose experiences were antithetical to what Chi Omega stands for. Chi Omega lost members, and some universities lost faith in Greek systems and seized the opportunity to support abolishment.

This movement shined a light on privilege, history, and lack of trust in systems – both perceived and real. For some, it seemed impossible to face forward and believe in the possibilities of Chi Omega and lifetime membership in our Fraternity. For many collegiate leaders, the burden of leadership was overwhelming and negatively impacted their mental health and their academics. Chi Omega will always be grateful for the stamina, courage and commitment shown by these Sisters and that this movement allowed us all to examine what is valued in Chi Omega and how to work to ensure that she evolves and remains relevant.

## COMMITMENT TO EVOLVING AS AN ORGANIZATION

The Governing Council set a forward-facing goal for the biennium – “To ensure Chi Omega's continued relevance through intentional organizational evolution.” A few years ago, 96% of alumnae said that Chi Omega was still relevant to them. That's quite a high bar and the Council is committed to ensuring that level of relevance continues. Organizational evolution. Evolution is defined by important and irreversible change vs revolution that can be instant temporal and episodic.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE DEI COMMITTEE

The Special Committee on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion convened on October 24 after 6 weeks of planning by the Leadership Team, led by Sister Joslyn McGriff. They were tasked with the following goal: “Make recommendations to the Governing Council after a holistic review of policies, procedures and practices to ensure an ever-evolving, more inclusive Chi Omega”.

In our Symphony, Chi Omegas are challenged to “choose thoughtfully that course which occasion and conscience demand.” Representing some 265,000 Sisters on “that course” was the biggest challenge. Our intent for DEI work is to embrace the “Inclusion” portion and ensure that all of our current collegians and alumnae, who hold viewpoints across the spectrum, are educated and moved to improve as a whole. Thus, the emphasis on evolution.

Of course, the work of the DEI Special Committee is ongoing – not all of this can happen at once, nor should it. The work of this committee will continue and evolve. Included in the committee recommendations are small adjustments that will make a big impact over time, as well as big changes that will make an immediate impact.

## **MODELING DEI EDUCATION ON CAMPUS AND AMONG FRATERNAL GROUPS**

There is significant opportunity for education and collaboration as there are significantly more ways to being “Greek” than just the various members of the National Panhellenic Conference (NPC) and Interfraternity Council (IFC). Chi Omega wants to be the leader in showing the world all the ways one can be “fraternity”.

1. Chi Omega will gift a video to all host institutions on the broad fraternal landscape to educate and encourage how to effectively partner with the National Multicultural Greek Council, National Pan-Hellenic Council and National Association of Latino Fraternal Organizations groups, among others.
2. Chi Omega’s CEO will sit down with the Executive Directors from these groups to model collaborative conversations as a training tool.
3. The Executive Headquarters will provide education and resources on how to be leaders in the local collegiate Panhellenic community to reduce the frills and soft costs sometimes associated with sorority membership.

## **CHI OMEGA-SPECIFIC TOOLS AND EDUCATION FOR MEMBERS**

Chi Omega intends to provide tools and education that help members learn to promote equity, diversity, inclusion, and civility.

- 1) A DEI Training and Resource Team of Sisters will be appointed to support programming and education.
- 2) Member Education will be created over time in the context of the Symphony.
- 3) Further, each collegiate chapter will be required to appoint a DEI Chair. Education for that leader starts immediately.
- 4) DEI training will be woven throughout all officer training at the annually held Fireside Leadership Training.

Chi Omega plans to make it a priority to “promote civility” and expects our Sisters to lead with civility, including in DEI discussions internally in our chapters and outwardly on our campuses. Chi Omega hopes through chapter-tailored DEI education, as well as national endeavors promoting inclusivity, our members can be leaders in this regard. Civility need not be a lost art, and Chi Omega will teach it and value it.

## **INCREASING AFFORDABILITY AND PROMOTING LIFETIME VALUE OF MEMBERSHIP**

Chi Omega must take the lead on each of our campuses to increase transparency around costs, improve affordability and expand access.

Like most professional, academic, and affinity groups, it costs money to be a Chi Omega, however Chi Omega believes the value of membership should far exceed the price. The DEI Committee acknowledged that Chi Omega national dues are reasonable, particularly for the lifetime value of membership. However, where they found the greatest opportunity for monetary impact is at the chapter level.

- The Executive Headquarters will provide guidance, tools and best practices for publicizing and reducing the burden of soft costs. Examples of soft costs include specific wardrobe requirements, little sister favors, other required t-shirts, merchandise and event tickets, etc.
- Additionally, the pandemic has further stressed that Chi Omega has members who leave permanently due to short-term financial hardship. Therefore, the Governing Council would like to encourage local chapters to create emergency dues funds for members in need. Of course, the Executive Headquarters will assist in helping chapters create this infrastructure through templates and best practices.
- Further, to model the way of Sisters Helping Sisters when it matters the most, the Governing Council has agreed for the Fraternity to donate \$500,000 from long-held savings dollars reserved as a result of good fortune and careful stewardship over a number of decades as a seed endowment for a National Scholarship Fund through the Chi Omega Foundation. Though the scholarship dollars will be for educational purposes, these funds will be distributed directly to the member and will free up personal resources for our members to pay dues and remain in Chi Omega.

## **INCREASING PATHWAYS TO MEMBERSHIP THROUGH RECRUITMENT**

Chi Omega can't incorporate DEI changes without also including adjustments to recruitment and the goal of improving accessibility and equity. Unlike many of sorority peer groups, Chi Omega's recruitment practices and decisions have largely resided at the chapter level for decades. This is an important tenet as the proposed changes are unveiled below.

First, Chi Omega will remove barriers on the front end of the recruitment process to ensure women from diverse backgrounds feel and remain welcome in Chi Omega.

- Chi Omega plans to rename the RIF from "Recruitment Information Form" to "Recruitment Introduction Form" which will better describe our existing approach: introducing women of all walks of life to Chi Omega. Further, interested PNMs will be able to directly request RIFs and submit resumes through a clearly identifiable link on the Chi Omega website, meaning if they are unable to

locate a Chi Omega in their personal network, they can request a connection to a Chi Omega in their area.

- Chi Omega's Area Recruitment Introduction Chairs (ARICs) will renew their existing focus acting as alumnae brand ambassadors for Chi Omega, helping all PNM's find a path to Chi Omega locally.
- Additionally, should other pathways be undiscoverable, a chapter advisor may continue to sign a RIF for a PNM during the recruitment process.
- Chi Omega collegians will now be able to submit PNM letters of introduction to other Chi Omega chapters and will be educated on how to do so. This will embolden and empower our collegians to feel invested in the recruitment process, not just at their chapter, but across the country.
- The National Recruitment Team is thoroughly reviewing all practices included in the Recruitment Handbook to ensure a more inclusive process, including conversation activities that are focused on comfort and content and will be shaped to the interests of the PNM in an effort to "meet them where they are" about lived experiences and to value the diverse backgrounds of current and potential new members.

## **CHI OMEGA LEGACIES**

In regard to legacies, many groups have made massive overhauls to their legacy policies in recent months. However, what is less known is that many of those groups have changed their formerly stringent National policies to be more like Chi Omega's decades-old policy, which essentially gives our local chapters autonomy over how they want to handle legacies.

In other words, Chi Omega's legacy policy has been much more relaxed than our peer groups for over three decades, allowing for an entire generation of Chi Omegas to already benefit from largely a locally-based approach.

However, Chi Omega is still making a small adjustment to ensure each chapter can invite back women who are the best fits, while still respecting the families of the legacies going through recruitment. Chi Omega is still going to ask local chapters to invite legacies back to the first invitation round as a courtesy – but only if the chapter has room on their invite lists. If a chapter's numbers do not allow for this courtesy, we ask that the chapter please communicate this with local recruitment volunteers and Chi Omega families.

## **INCREASING DEI INITIATIVES FROM THE NATIONAL LEVEL**

The overarching goal of our work is for Chi Omega to be more inclusive and to ensure that membership is for a lifetime.

- Chi Omega will develop a more transparent and robust communication and engagement plan to identify, recruit, train, and engage future Fraternity leaders at both a local and a national level.
- Chi Omega will work diligently to have a greater array of diverse Sisters reflected in branding and marketing.
- Chi Omega will invite three collegians to be part of The Eleusis Editorial Board, ensuring the magazine remains relevant to all generations and provides a broader scope of Sisterhood.
- Chi Omega will ask the National House Corporation Team to work with local house corporations to create an accessibility plan ensuring the greatest degree of accessibility in our facilities, wherever possible.
- A Ritual Task Force will be appointed to review our Ritual and other Special Ceremonies to ensure the existing Ritual be maintained with minor modifications made to accommodate members' diverse religious identities..

## **MODIFICATION TO CHI OMEGA'S MEMBERSHIP POLICY**

The Governing Council is modifying the Policy on Membership to include females and individuals who identify as women. As the understanding of gender as evolved, it is vital that Chi Omega's membership policy reflects this evolving definition of gender. Our General Counsel has worked on this policy modification along with our good friend and attorney, Stevie Tran, an attorney specializing in trans law who assisted the work of the DEI Special Committee.

## **CONCLUSION**

The DEI Special Committee worked hard to meet the challenge of ensuring an ever-evolving, more inclusive Chi Omega, which was no small task. These Sisters and friends have chosen thoughtfully -- and generations of Chi Omegas will be the beneficiaries. Chi Omega is committed to evolution -- not revolution -- and will work earnestly to ensure that these recommendations are inculcated into Chi Omega's policies and practices.