

Utah State University

Defer Rush for First-Year Students

OBJECTIVE:

Our proposal is to require first year students to complete 12 semester hours of coursework with a GPA of at least 2.25 before participating in Greek rush (new member recruitment). Such a requirement is often called 'deferred rush' because first year students are ineligible to participate in fraternity/sorority new member recruitment until their second semester on campus. This requirement would apply to all first year students, including transfer students. Fraternities and sororities would still be allowed to conduct new member recruitment during Fall Semester but they would be precluded from recruiting and offering bids to anyone who has completed less than 12 semester hours and a GPA of less than 2.25.

RATIONALE:

The first year on campus should focus students academically and prepare them for a successful college experience. Universities which have implemented deferred rush policies collectively believe that fall semester should be used by first year students to adjust to the demands of college and to establish positive study patterns capable of sustaining them through their college careers. A common motivation for deferring rush is the desire to ensure that freshmen are able to demonstrate the ability to adjust to the university's academic environment before becoming fully engaged in social activities. We are also of the belief that that deferred rush will contribute to instilling a deeper academic tone on campus for many schools, including Utah State, laboring under a so-called 'party school' image that remains such a legitimate concern for parents of so many college-bound young people.

Numerous schools with academically-oriented reputations have chosen to defer rush for first year students. These include Emory, Vanderbilt, Lehigh, Davidson, University of the Pacific, Princeton University, Cal Poly, and the University of Virginia. Others may have joined these ranks since the period in which this research was conducted. The general reason to defer rush was, in many cases, driven by the belief that a positive academic experience during the first semester is related to the ability to make better decisions about the social clubs and activities in which a student may choose to become involved. This decision is based on evidence that the Greek experience for first year freshmen students often has a negative influence on the academic careers of less disciplined students.

Vanderbilt's rush policy stipulates that students must have a cumulative GPA of at least 2.3 prior to participating in Greek rush; this effectively precludes freshmen from joining fraternities or sororities until at least the second semester of their first year. Davidson not only defers rush for the first year students but also restricts the pledge period to the middle six weeks of the second semester to ensure that second semester students have four weeks both before and after the 6-week pledge period to devote to their academic pursuits.

Generally speaking, deferred rush is more the exception than the rule at many colleges and universities. For example, all but three institutions on the Georgia Southern University peer and aspirant list continue to allow their first year students to participate in Greek rush during the fall semester of their freshman year. Appalachian State University (ASU) is one peer/aspirant institution that has chosen to defer rush for first year students.

ASU has a fall rush, but only for students who have completed 12 semester hours of in-class coursework and have an accumulative GPA of 2.25 are allowed to participate. Formal rush is held each spring semester at ASU and first year students who have completed 12 hours with a GPA of 2.25 are eligible to participate.

The decision to defer rush at ASU was based on a study conducted by the university's Office of Student Development. This investigation provided evidence that students who wait at least one semester before joining a Greek organization do better than those who do not. The results revealed that male students who pledge a fraternity during their first semester had GPAs that were lower than male students who did not pledge during their first semester. This study also found that fraternity and sorority members were less likely than non-fraternity and sorority members to participate in other student activities available on campus and also had lower scores on critical thinking and reading tests.

The deferred rush decisions made at the institutions mentioned above were often in conflict with the views and desires of the universities' Greek organizations. For example, immediately after the decision to defer rush at Lehigh, articles in the campus newspaper speculated that the move could lead to the death of the Greek system. The actual impact, however, was just the opposite, with fraternity and sorority membership attaining an all-time high at Lehigh. This was attributed both to Greek organizations having more time to make good decisions about to whom to extend bids and better choices being made by first year students about which organizations to join. Articles in many campus newspapers provide both anecdotal and statistical evidence that membership in Greek organizations can contribute positively to the GPAs of academically capable students.

According to Utah State Legislator Carol Moss, reasons cited for Utah State University and the Utah State Board of Regents opposing delayed recruitment (deferred rush) relate to fraternities and sororities relying on fees generated through new freshmen pledges, with the predominate religion being Latter Day Saint, alcohol consumption/binge drinking is not a major issue or concern to school administrators, and, finally, meeting annual freshmen enrollment goals requires the attraction of fraternity and sorority socialization as an enrollment incentive.

While we are grateful for the enumerated steps taken by Utah State University to protect and safeguard our young people during their first school year in a new, often complex, and challenging environment, we strongly feel that delayed recruitment of freshmen into Greek life is a concept worthy of fresh consideration by any institution of higher learning that places so steep a premium on sheer academic pursuit – surely the foremost concern of bankrolling parents.

George Starks

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