
Final Report of the Ad Hoc Trustee Committee on Campus Life



AMHERST COLLEGE
The Board of Trustees
February 21, 1984

AMHERST COLLEGE
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THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES

February 25, 1984

TO: THE AMHERST COLLEGE COMMUNITY

The Board of Trustees met in New York City on Friday, February 24, to receive and act upon the final recommendations of the Ad Hoc Committee on Campus Life. After reviewing the history of residential and social life and fraternities at Amherst, and concluding that a new residential system is essential to the improvement of campus life, the committee recommended that fraternities be discontinued at the College effective June 30, 1984. The Trustees considered the committee's report carefully and thoroughly, and voted unanimously to end the fraternity system. A full copy of the Ad Hoc Committee's final report and the Board's resolutions accompany this letter.

In taking this action on fraternities, the Board shared the committee's view that the quality of social and residential life at the College has become deficient and that the rededication of fraternity buildings to better uses is essential to the overall improvement in campus life. Upon the recommendation of the committee, the Board also has approved and authorized construction of a campus center at the earliest practicable date; and it has asked for a study of all other residential, social and recreational needs of the College. The Trustees have asked Acting President Craig to work closely with campus-based groups to plan appropriate arrangements for the 1984-85 academic year. Also, they have asked President-designate Pouncey to work closely with groups and individuals representing all constituencies of the College to develop long-range residential and social plans.

On behalf of the Board, let me take this opportunity to thank the Ad Hoc Committee, again, for its devoted, intensive work over the past five months, and to thank everyone who contributed to the Board's review process.

The Board believes strongly, as the report states, that this is the time and the opportunity for everyone who cares about Amherst "to work together to make Amherst a better college."



George B. Beitzel, Chairman
Board of Trustees

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Final Report of the Ad Hoc Trustee Committee on Campus Life

Introduction

In presenting to the Board of Trustees its Interim Report, dated January 9, 1984, the Ad Hoc Trustee Committee on Campus Life made the following statements:

Hence, we will first review the on-campus situation without judging the role or place of fraternities, will diagnose the causes for some of the apparent short-comings in the quality of campus life, and, thus, will share with the Board of Trustees our thinking to date.

In a subsequent report, prepared after discussion by the full Board of the issues raised herein, we will conclude our views on fraternities and possible alternative ways to sustain the many traditional values of fraternities and will recommend to the Trustees a decision on the future of fraternities.

We believe that, in accepting and endorsing the principles set forth in the Interim Report, the Trustees have established the basis for creating a new vision of Amherst's social and residential life and have created a framework in which a decision can now be made about the future role of fraternities.

We respectfully submit this Final Report.

History

The proper role of fraternities at Amherst (including the question of their continued existence) has been examined repeatedly since World War II. During this thirty-eight-year period the Trustees made a series of judgments about Amherst fraternities that have changed the role, nature, and significance of fraternities in Amherst campus life. It is important to recall these Trustee decisions and their implications as we consider the future of fraternities.

In anticipation of the conclusion of World War II the Alumni Committee Report on Postwar Amherst recommended that fraternities be abolished at Amherst College. A Faculty Committee on Long-Range Policy reached a similar conclusion. Both recommendations were reported to the Board of Trustees in January of 1945.

In the first postwar action on campus life the Trustees voted in June of 1945 to permit fraternities to reopen and they have been open since. In the minutes of the June meeting the Trustees said, "At the proper time and under requirements to be set forth at a later date by the Board of Trustees the fraternities [will] be permitted to reopen at Amherst College." Included in the Board's resolution were the following statements:

1. That the fraternities have failed markedly in recent years to make a positive contribution to campus life and

2. That the interest of the college can best be served at this time by a program of radical reform rather than by one of abolition with its inevitable untried substitute.

The Trustees had decided in 1940 to construct Valentine Hall in the belief that the centralization of dining would foster class and college spirit. Hence, when fraternities reopened after World War II they were no longer allowed to provide meals to their members. The Board felt that the fraternities had become too important in the lives of undergraduates, excessively diverting loyalty from the college and dividing the campus into small independent units with a minimum of common bonds and interests. The symbol of such a divisive role was dining in the fraternity.

A second and vitally important vote of the Trustees in conjunction with the decision to reopen fraternities after World War II was to assure what became known as "100% rushing" and the resultant Lord Jeff Club as an alternative to fraternities. In adopting recommendations the Board said, "In reopening the fraternities the college will make available such additional facilities as may be needed to provide living quarters and appointments for social life equal to those now available at fraternity houses, to the end that each member of the three upper classes who wishes to join a social organization may have the opportunity of doing so."

In this policy declaration the Trustees apparently were concerned about the question of rejection in a selection process and endeavored to make it possible for anyone who wished to join a fraternity and to participate in Amherst's fraternity-based social life to do so — or nearly so.

The argument for 100% rushing implies that Amherst should be a place to nurture healthy growth to self-confident maturity without risking unnecessary disappointment.

The third postwar Trustee decision of significance occurred at the meeting of April 20, 1946, when the Trustees voted "that on or before October 1, 1948, each chapter of a fraternity at Amherst College shall formally advise the Board of Trustees of Amherst College that there is no prohibition or restriction by reason of race, color, or creed affecting the selection of the members of such chapter."

Hence, Amherst fraternities were asked to assure the Trustees that charters of each of the national fraternities

represented on the Amherst campus were free of language condoning discrimination on the basis of race or religion. That form of discrimination was considered unacceptable at Amherst College and was ended, at least in the sense that it was proscribed.

Thirty-four years later, a similar and equally important decision was made. On March 1, 1980, the Board of Trustees declared that gender could no longer be the basis of discrimination with regard to fraternity membership.

Returning to the post World War II chronology, the minutes of the Board meeting of June 9, 1951, state that:

The President* discussed at length the social life of the fraternities and felt that it had deteriorated and should be improved. The Board generally agreed to the President's proposed suggestions for limiting the social activities of the fraternity houses.

In 1956, Scarab, the senior honor society, voted to recommend the abolition of fraternities. Again, the Board appointed a committee to study fraternities. It reported in 1957 and recommended that fraternities be continued. The Trustees agreed.

In 1961 the fraternities' increasing problems in meeting operational and maintenance expenses and the lack of financial support from alumni prompted the Trustees to authorize the acquisition of fraternity properties and the assumption of their financial obligations.

In 1963 the Trustees authorized the construction of student housing that for the first time, with the possible exception of Pratt Hall, offered living and social amenities that were physically as attractive to the students as the fraternities. The creation of the "social dorms" was an effort to mitigate the pressure to choose fraternity membership to secure superior living conditions rather than to enjoy other qualities of fraternity life.

The minutes of the meeting of January 25, 1969, state:

The President proposed that the College Council through a committee which would be appointed by the College Council, provided the President, Trustees, Committee of Six, the Student Council, and the House Management Committee so request, conduct a study of student life and also consider new ways in which fraternity buildings might be used in the event some fraternities cease operations as fraternities.

During the 1970s the Trustees received reports on the weakening of certain houses and the inclination of seniors to withdraw from fraternity life. Subsequently, much of the Trustee concern was focused on the implications for fraternities of coeducation, the "unacceptable acts" by members of two fraternities, and the receipt of President Gibbs's six principles outlined in his working paper, "The Place of Fraternities at Amherst College."

And, finally, in October 1983 the Trustees, in response to the urging of Acting President Craig and to their concern over the quality of student social and residential life, formed this Ad Hoc Trustee Committee on Campus Life.

* The President at that time was C. W. Cole '27, who, like his successors mentioned in later paragraphs, was a fraternity member.

In Retrospect

In standing back from the Trustee decisions and actions over nearly forty years it is instructive to see what has occurred. It seems to us the Board has been consistent and, in the long run, unequivocal in dealing with fraternity issues, but has failed to deal adequately with the major social and residential issues of which fraternities are a part.

The Board has voted consistently for the continuation of fraternities while at the same time expressing concern over whether or not the fraternities could establish and maintain an acceptable standard of social behavior. It acted twice to limit discrimination as the basis for fraternity membership, first, on the grounds of race, color, and creed, and then on the basis of gender. It acted to diminish the role of fraternities by abolishing fraternity dining and creating 100% rushing. It acted to save fraternities from financial collapse while protecting the residential capacity of the fraternities.

Over these years the environment of the college has changed through the Trustees' responses to and solutions of a variety of important problems in their goal to create a better Amherst. As a consequence of these decisions the role of fraternities at the college has progressively diminished. Whenever the fraternities and the college stood in opposition the decision was made in favor of the college. And whenever fraternity practices and principle stood in opposition, a principled decision was made.

Where Are We Now?

In the view of this committee, we are at a time of final decision.

Before presenting our recommendations, we wish to emphasize a few points.

First, in its Interim Report, this committee stated:

Amherst's social and residential problems are not caused by fraternities nor will they be resolved by a decision as to the future of fraternities.

The committee remains of the same mind. The investigation conducted by this committee, its Interim Report and this Report have not been a "trial" of the fraternities. All of the committee were fraternity members at Amherst* and we do not approach the conclusion with respect to them with any particular relish.

The question is not whether the fraternities are solely "to blame" for the unsatisfactory residential and social life on the campus (they are *not*), but whether they can reasonably be expected to play a constructive and affirmative role in attaining a better integration of the educational goals of the college. As indicated in the Interim Report, of the twelve national fraternities represented on the campus in September 1946, only two remain. Six others have become "locals," with varying degrees of insolvency. The remainder have disappeared.

We believe that the fraternities' current number and membership are insufficient to assure their survival, let alone their renaissance. Further, there is no assurance that

* Respectively, Theta Delta Chi, Alpha Delta Phi, Chi Phi, Chi Psi and Psi Upsilon

a resurgence of interest in fraternities is likely, even with strong and well financed college support.

In their current condition of membership, the fraternities occupy valuable real property over-utilized for social activity and under-utilized for housing. The rededication of fraternity buildings to better uses is essential to the college's overall improvement in campus life.

It is evident that the fraternities have on occasion been the venue of gross social behavior which is no longer tolerable. Despite the efforts of the Trustees, and the efforts of successive administrations and of individual fraternity members, past and present, to ameliorate the potential hurt and humiliation in the system, that condition has been the experience of a substantial number of Amherst students over the years.

We believe that the historical values of fraternities—self-governance, fiscal responsibility, leadership, friendship, and group identity—can be achieved in other forms of residential/social organization.

We believe, finally, that Amherst, as a residential college, can be better without fraternities than it can with them.

Why Now?

A question—raised by faculty members, students and alumni—asks the Board, through the committee, why it is acting now instead of giving the fraternities the opportunity to “pass” or “fail” the tests set forth in President Gibbs’s “White Paper.”

Our response is that circumstances alter cases.

It is probably true that, had he lived, President Gibbs would have spent a portion of his time attempting to oversee the implementation of his Six Principles. How long he would have enmeshed himself in that effort, considering the press of other presidential duties, is speculative. The question, he said, was more likely to be “not whether but when.”

We know two new facts occasioned by his death. His successor, Acting President Craig, is also a fraternity alumnus. Unlike President Gibbs, he has spent forty-four years of his life on the Amherst campus. His advice to the Board is that, for all intents and purposes, the fraternity system “no longer exists” at the college and that we should commence an examination of alternative living and social arrangements. We also know that, in President-designate Pouncey, we have a person whose energy, imagination and

interest in students make him ideally suited to lead such an examination, one which can be both constructive and exciting.

Further, the Board has been given an opportunity to deal with this matter afresh. It is possible that, in the course of continuing deliberations about fraternities, some entirely new insight might emerge. Given the history of the last forty years, we are skeptical about this possibility. Reflecting on the concerns expressed in our Interim Report, we believe the Board should take this opportunity to make a new start.

The committee recognizes that there is, in matters such as this, no right or wrong time or better or worse time to come to a conclusion. The question is whether this is an appropriate, and perhaps even propitious, time. We believe it is. The committee looks forward to new ideas, new initiatives and new opportunities under a new president.

Recommendations

Our recommendations are intended to provide the basis for achieving at Amherst the kind of distinction in the quality of campus social and residential life described in our Interim Report. Our recommendations are:

1. To establish and administer objectively, compassionately and fairly standards of individual and group behavior to assure a new level of civility and humanity on the campus.
2. To discontinue the fraternity system on June 30, 1984.
3. To undertake an immediate and vigorous effort to plan and create on the campus better physical spaces and amenities for student residential, study, and social activities.
4. To make Amherst truly a residential college by requiring all students to live on campus (as housing is available), and to grant sparingly permission to live off campus.
5. To authorize immediately the planning and construction of a campus center.

We attach proposed resolutions to carry out our recommendations.

We forward these recommendations to the Board of Trustees wholeheartedly, enthusiastically, and unanimously. We believe that this is the time and the opportunity for all Amherst men and women to work together to make Amherst a better college.

K. Frank Austen
Charles R. Longworth, Chairman
Robert J. McKean, Jr.
Robert L. Woodbury
Thomas H. Wyman

February 21, 1984

Resolutions

The Trustees have received with appreciation the Final Report, dated February 21, 1984, of the Ad Hoc Trustee Committee on Campus Life and, once again, commend all those members of the Amherst family who have participated in the process that has resulted in the issuance of the Report.

After careful consideration and full discussion, the Trustees have adopted the resolutions set forth below. Because of the complexity of these matters and their importance to the continued well-being and preeminence of the College, the Trustees have subdivided the resolutions into seven Parts consisting of:

- Part I. Principles Involved
- Part II. The Role of Fraternities
- Part III. Student Residence
- Part IV. Use of College Facilities
- Part V. Campus Center and Other Space Needs
- Part VI. Charge to Present Administration
- Part VII. Charge to Incoming Administration

Now, therefore, upon motion duly made and seconded, it was unanimously

RESOLVED:

Part I. Principles Involved

1. The quality of the social and residential life at Amherst College is central to, and a vital part of the educational undertaking of the College.
2. In this belief, the principles of that life can be expressed as follows:
 - A. The opportunity to know and learn from students with diverse backgrounds and experience is an educational value and should be realized in part through residential housing policies.
 - B. Student residential facilities should be conducive to intellectual and cultural activity and should support the fundamental educational mission of the College.
 - C. All students should have equal access to the variety and quality of housing.
 - D. Students have the right, and indeed, the need to choose friends and companions. Housing policies should reflect that right so far as it is compatible with the intended diversification of students and their enjoying equal access to housing.
 - E. Individual tastes and needs are important and the College should provide a variety of living situations.
 - F. The College's housing policy should enhance opportunities to learn self-government, leadership, cooperation, fiscal responsibility, social conscientiousness and respect and compassion for fellow humans.
 - G. As a residential college, Amherst College:
 - (i) should provide an opportunity for each student to live in College housing with reasonable standards of personal privacy, comfort, safety and quiet, with sufficient space and appropriate furniture and fixtures for study.
 - (ii) should provide social spaces to meet the variety of social needs of students.
 - (iii) should, with only limited exceptions, require its students to live in College housing.

Part II. The Role of Fraternities

1. The quality of the social and residential life at Amherst College has become inadequate to the needs of the College and its students.
2. Fraternities have not been the sole cause of the diminution of the quality of that life, but have been a contributing factor.
3. Many constructive and exciting means exist for restructuring the social and residential life at the College and, in doing so, rejuvenating the quality of that life.
4. The fraternity system that exists at the College today lacks the capacity to perform a central and positive role in creating and building upon a new vision of campus life.
5. The Board has therefore determined that the fraternity system should be, and it hereby is, discontinued at the College effective June 30, 1984.

Part III. Student Residence

1. The Board renews its commitment that Amherst shall continue to be a residential college.
2. On and after July 1, 1984, students shall reside in residential units provided by the College unless expressly permitted by the Dean of Students to live elsewhere:
 - A. In all cases, permission shall be granted or denied by the Dean of Students in the exercise of his or her discretion under rules and regulations of the College of general applicability. A decision by the Dean of Students may be appealed to the President, whose decision shall be final. It is the intention of the Board that permission shall not be granted if, in the judgment of the Dean of Students, the request for permission is made with the intent of avoiding the intent and purposes of these resolutions or the rules and regulations of the College of general applicability then in effect with respect to residence.
 - B. The Trustees charge the Administration to submit to the Board rules and regulations to carry out the principles set forth in these resolutions.

Part IV. Use of College Facilities

1. On and after February 25, 1984, no resource of the College (physical, staff or monetary) shall be used or employed, directly or indirectly, in any procedure relating to rushing, pledging, initiating or otherwise admitting to, or maintaining, membership by any student of the College in any fraternity, sorority or other social club, society or organization (however denominated).
2. On and after July 1, 1984, every building owned or leased by the College and used by the College to house one or more students then attending the College shall be subject to rules and regulations of the College of general applicability from time to time in effect allocating residential space, and no fraternity, sorority or other social club, society or organization (however denominated) shall be permitted to participate, directly or indirectly, in the allocation process.
3. Nothing in these resolutions shall be deemed to prohibit the use of any building owned or leased by the College for meetings (including social functions, subject to rules and regulations of the College of general applicability) held by honorary clubs, societies and organizations such as Phi Beta Kappa and Sigma Xi.
4. Nothing in these resolutions shall be deemed to prohibit the use of any building owned or leased by the College for a residential use directly related to the educational program of the College (such as a "language house") solely by reason of the fact that social functions, subject to rules and regulations of the College of general applicability, may occur there from time to time. However, care should be taken to observe principle D of Part I of these resolutions.

Part V. Campus Center and Other Space Needs

1. The Board hereby authorizes the construction, at the earliest practicable date, of a campus center; authorizes and directs the Administration and the Budget and Finance, Buildings and Grounds, Development and Student Life Committees of the Board (working with such campus organizations as may be specified by the President) to commence, forthwith, planning for the construction of that facility; and directs the Administration and such Trustee committees to present a progress report to the Board at its Commencement Meeting in 1984.
2. The Board recognizes the need for other residential, social and recreational spaces on the campus and authorizes and directs the Administration and such Trustee committees to commence, forthwith, a study thereof.

Part VI. Charge to the Present Administration

1. The Board, recognizing the constraints of time, charges the present Administration to adopt a plan for housing the students attending the College during the academic year July 1, 1984—June 30, 1985 in a manner as consistent as reasonably possible under the circumstances with the intent and purposes of these resolutions and the principles they enunciate. In these respects, decisions by the President then in office shall be final.
2. The Board charges the present Administration to continue preparation for substantial revisions in campus social and residential life in the years to follow, developing ideas, gathering data, eliciting opinions and otherwise preparing for an effective and seamless transition to the incoming Administration.

3. The Board charges the present Administration to coordinate the efforts to be undertaken pursuant to the directives contained in Part V of these resolutions.

Part VII. Charge to Incoming Administration

1. The Board charges the incoming Administration, promptly upon assuming office, to work closely with students, faculty, alumni and its own members to foster a new shared sense of purpose and definition in Amherst's non-curricular life, to include:

- A. defining housing and social policies and practices that reflect and effect the ideals and standards stated in these resolutions, including self-governance, access, diversity, comfort, convenience, and safety;
- B. examining and recommending the means to achieve a better social and physical environment in all Amherst College housing, including consideration of new housing if needed, renovation of existing spaces, and the addition of social spaces including lounges, libraries, cooking and other facilities; and
- C. defining limits of acceptable behavior for individuals and residential units and specifying ways in which conformance with the definitions will be maintained.