What does the Interfraternity Council Charter tell us about perceptions of fraternities and their organizing board members?


The charter of the Interfraternity Council (IFC) at the University of Illinois is the document by which fraternities are to be registered, maintained, and governed. The document appears at the surface to be a constitution for the acceptance and proper conduct of fraternities and their members, as well as policies for election of executive board members to the IFC and fraternities.

What I found strange at first was the IFC’s perception of individuals outside the fraternity: one of its purposes is “to lessen the disparity between fraternity ideals and individual behavior and to personalize these ideals in the daily undergraduate experience.” They also declare that a standard of a fraternity is to “promote conduct consistent with good morals and good taste.” Despite anecdotal evidence to the contrary, these two statements insinuate that those who are not in the Greek system are not on par with a higher standard of behavior and that there is an inherent problem with normal behavior in relation to fraternity life.

The supposed higher standard that fraternity members are judged by is supported in the IFC charter by the statement that "members of the Executive Board shall, at the time of their election, hold a GPA cumulative average no less than a 3.0". The fact that many academic organizations and honor societies on campus would find a 3.0 GPA to be substandard is not a hindrance for the leaders of the IFC. Another aspect of the charter that I was interested in is the system in which new fraternities are recognized and become part of the IFC. To do so, an organization must already be part of an existing fraternity oversight board or have been an associate
member of the IFC as well as gain 2/3 of the President’s Council votes to be inducted.

The idea of IFC membership seems only to be a continuation of the status quo, and that it would be easy for an established fraternity to open a new chapter at the University, while a group of people seeking to become a fraternity would have to jump through many more hoops to do so.

In analyzing this document, I found a double standard existing for those the IFC perceived to be "outside" the Greek system and part of it. While the "higher standards" of Greek conduct are posed in the charter, someone outside the system would find it easy to point out disparities, both in the document and in real-life examples of fraternity conduct at the University.