

Do Latino Greek Organizations Foster More Political Activity Than Other Latino-based Student Organizations?

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EXPLORE

Question

What questions is your inquiry contingent upon?

What political movements have occurred in which Latino-based organizations have been a part of since the 1990's?

How many Latino Greek organizations have hosted political/educational/philanthropy events within the last five years? How many Latino-based non-Greek organizations have hosted political/educational/philanthropy events within the last five years?

What contributions have each of the organizations to the Latino community on and off campus?

Plan

How will you go about answering your inquiry?

Why did you decide to join a Latino Greek-lettered or registered student organization?

What type of programming has your organization conducted over the past year?

What problems do you see that need to be addressed on the U of I campus, and can your organization be part of the solution?

Describe what you know about the 1992 Protests at the University of Illinois.

Do you think that there should be something similar to what occurred in 1992 now? And why/why not?

What is the reason an organization like yours was established on this campus?

OBSERVE

What observations, or findings are you encountering in your research?

One of the main issues that seem to be common among all those interviewed is the issue of racism on campus. Half of those interviewed stated that one of the issues was the Chief, and how it has made the campus climate tenser, due to the fact that the University of Illinois endorses a mascot representing a Native American stereotype. Another pressing issue made amongst the interviewees was cultural insensitivity, usually done through culturally-themed parties. Many people in Greek and non-Greek Latino organizations had contributed to several protests and made it public that what is going on is offensive to people of color. The University of Illinois is not the only institution that allows such behaviors to continue. Here are some examples:

"Ghetto Fabulous" - University of Texas Law Students- 2006

"Hood Party" - John Hopkins University Sigma Chi - 2006

"Big Booty Hoes & Ghetto Bros" - University of Illinois -Fraternity & Sorority - 2006

"Tacos & Tequila" - University of Illinois - Tri Delta & Zeta Beta Tau - 2006

"Straight Thuggin" - University of Chicago - 2005

"Republican BlackFace Party" - Penn State – 2004

Quad protest targets racial stereotyping
Group lambasts ZBT, Tri Deltas, hopes to get University's attention

With signs reading "The fight is far from over" and "My culture is not a costume," hundreds of students filled the Quad side of the Illini Union this afternoon for a rally entitled "Breaking the Silence."

The rally was organized by Students Transforming Oppression and Privilege (STOP). The purpose was to get the University administration's attention regarding racist actions across campus that were exemplified in the Oct. 5 exchange between the Delta Delta Delta sorority and the Zeta Beta Tau fraternity unofficially dubbed "Tacos and Tequila."

"We are not attacking the Tri Deltas or ZBT," said Wendy Marie Finley, member of STOP and junior in LAS. "We are attacking the system. We are just using them as an example."

Students spoke against the racist actions during the rally on the Quad before students walked to both the Tri Delta and ZBT houses chanting phrases such as "hey hey, ho ho, racism has got to go."

Tri Delta and ZBT representatives declined to comment.

"We have had enough," said Osvaldo Torres, sophomore in LAS and member of Lambda Theta Phi, a United Greek Council Latin fraternity, the Mexican Student Association. "We will no longer be disrespected on this campus. Our cultures will no longer be mocked. We will no longer be made fun of. We will no longer be told that we don't deserve to be here. And it all starts with one step. And that is unifying ourselves."

The rally ended at the Swanlund Administration Building, 601 E. John St., where a statement by Chancellor Herman was read by Renee Romano, vice chancellor for Student Affairs.

"The controversy has spurred a great deal of conversation about treating one another with common decency, and that is good," Herman said in his statement. "The process of reviewing the incident is now underway, and I believe a deeper appreciation of our cultural diversity and individual responsibility will be the result."

After Romano read the statement, some students asked why the administration did not speak on the Quad, what is going to be done to ensure minority students have a safe environment, why nothing was done last year when a "ghetto"-themed party occurred and

what would have been the response if a multi-cultural Greek organization held a party of a similar nature.

"I want to assure you that we are listening, we care, and this incident does not reflect the University's values," Romano said. "We are working through our system. It's not happening quickly and many of you are not aware of what is going on."

Romano also said there are plans including diversity education for all first-year students and the administration is working hard to get these classes implemented by next fall.

Lisa Moore, assistant dean of students, said the University has not sanctioned Tri Delta or ZBT because the Board of Fraternity Affairs and the Board of Sorority Affairs was given the power to discipline when chapters violate policy.

"Everything ZBT and Tri Delta have done are self-imposed sanctions," Moore said.

Moore also said that although the event was unacceptable, there were no code violations in the student code. She said they will have to see when the hearing is scheduled.

Nora Garcia, member of Lambda Pi Upsilon, a United Greek Council sorority, and senior in LAS, said she was upset that ZBT and Tri Delta did not think it would be a racial stereotype. She said that the administration needs to be aware that the minority student population is fed up and does not plan to let these actions go unnoticed.

"It is time for a change," Torres said. "It is time for us to step back, to put our egos aside, to put our organizations behind us, to put our letters behind us, to step up together to unify ourselves and to stand up as one voice to speak out at this university."

Two Greek houses on UI campus face sanctions
By Christine Des Garennes
Wednesday, November 29, 2006 7:21 AM CST

A University of Illinois advisory board has imposed sanctions on a fraternity and sorority following its investigation into a "Tacos and Tequila" party held earlier this fall.

Members of the UI's Board of Fraternity Affairs and Board of Sorority Affairs found Zeta Beta Tau and Delta Delta Delta violated the student code as well as fraternity and sorority rules about alcohol use.

The Oct. 5 party was hosted by the fraternity Zeta Beta Tau and involved members of the sorority Delta Delta Delta. Some students attending the party reportedly dressed up as Latino and Latina farmers, gardeners, pregnant women and illegal aliens.

UI Dean of Students Bill Riley said some of the students' behaviors

were "not just uninformed and insensitive, but some (students) were downright degrading in how they depicted themselves."

Several hundred students held a rally on campus in late October to protest the party and to urge administrators to condemn the behavior and take action.

Riley, Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs Renee Romano and Chancellor Richard Herman all issued statements expressing disappointment and calling the behavior unacceptable.

The matter was referred to the UI's office for student conflict resolution, which essentially administers campus discipline.

A hearing was held earlier this month and the boards of fraternity affairs and sorority affairs notified the organizations of the decision on Monday. The boards are made up of undergraduate students, alumni and faculty.

In their letter to ZBT and Tri Delta, members of the fraternity and sorority affairs boards wrote: "to say that members of the board (of fraternity affairs or sorority affairs) are disappointed in the actions of your members does not do justice to the harm done to our fraternal community and to the larger university community of students, staff and faculty. The blatant insensitivity and stereotyping behavior exhibited is in direct conflict with the values of your (fraternity or sorority), the UIUC Greek community and the university community more broadly."

The organizations will not be allowed to recruit new members during spring 2007. They were placed on social probation through fall 2007, banning events where alcohol is present. Zeta Beta Tau and Delta Delta Delta also were placed on conduct probation until the end of fall 2008, and will be monitored by an oversight committee.

In addition, the board recommended Dean Riley withdraw Zeta Beta Tau's certified housing status. However, Riley said he will hold on that recommendation until the board observes the fraternity's compliance with the other sanctions. If the certified housing status is removed, UI freshmen would not be allowed to live in the fraternity house.

The organizations were found to have violated portions of the student code which refer to the values of the University of Illinois, including respecting and valuing the dignity of others, and how students conduct themselves.

The organizations also were found to also have violated a number of guidelines within the sorority and fraternity system, including registering social functions and providing alcohol at social functions.

Both organizations will develop and implement programs for new members about multiculturalism and diversity. They will also put together educational plans for all of their members.

"These sanctions were ideas our chapter already planned on implementing," said Cassie Arner, Tri Delta alumni adviser. "We agree very much with the finding of the board; however, there are some sanctions we find disappointing," she added, citing social probation of the chapter, which limits the amount of events the chapter can sponsor.

"The chapter does feel that it now stands with an opportunity to affect real change on this campus when it comes to racism and cultural insensitivity," Arner said.

The sorority and fraternity can appeal the decision. Tri Delta has not made a decision regarding an appeal yet, Arner said. A message left Tuesday with the ZBT president was not returned.

There are 185 members of the UI's Tri Delta chapter and 115 to 120 members of the UI's ZBT chapter.

No students have been individually disciplined.

Fraternity punished for Halloween party

Tue Nov 21, 12:50 PM ET

Johns Hopkins University has put a fraternity on social probation because of a "Halloween in the Hood" party that angered members of the Black Student Union and sparked debate about race relations.

The university's Student Conduct Board hearing panel found the Sigma Chi fraternity guilty of all charges filed by the administration, including failure to supervise the conduct of the member who wrote the party invitation, resulting in harassment and intimidation. University officials pledged Monday to continue efforts they started after the Halloween weekend party to promote racial healing. University administrators have held two campus-wide forums and meetings with the Black Student Union.

The Sigma Chi chapter was placed on social probation until January 2008, meaning it is barred from holding parties and other social events.

The university said it also must recruit four adult advisers and incorporate diversity training into its new members program.

The university's Office of Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action concluded that the invitation to the party played on racial stereotypes by encouraging attendees to wear

"regional clothing from our locale" such as "bling bling ice ice, grills" and "hoochie hoops."

However, it found that a skeleton hanging from a rope noose was meant to represent the "Pirates of the Caribbean" movie and not to symbolize a lynching.

REFLECT

Link

Connect with other resources and materials.

Introduction

One of the cultures that has not had much exposure is that of the typical Latinos at the University of Illinois. The dynamics between themselves is unlike any other ethnic group present. Within this small community of people, there is much diversity in terms of style, ideology and background. Along with the variety of Latinos on this campus, there is their interaction between themselves that makes them interesting to study. This study will analyze their interactions within themselves, as well as with their own organizations and how they function and if they live up to their mission statements. Along with that, there will also be an evaluation of the types of programming that these Latino-based organizations complete throughout the fall semester of 2006. There has always been talk about the productivity of Latino RSO's, especially Greeks, and this work will identify key factors which lead certain groups to achieve their status as "active" on campus, as well as looking at those that are not as active and what they do instead of being part of the political machine.

Background

I decided to do research on this subject for many reasons. I, myself, being in a Greek-lettered fraternity as well as Latino, have heard from many students on how organizations on campus are not focusing attention on the real issues that are faced by minority students on campus. There have also been talks about how fraternities are just a group of immature guys that throw parties and grope women all the time, and how that stereotype is being placed upon the culturally-based Greeks on campus. Recently-established student organizations have taken a stand on making sure that they are the great change that this campus has needed in terms of political awareness and how to correct the errors that the University has overlooked for so long. By being politically active (which I will define later on), the efforts of those before us will not be in vain, and the struggle will live on within each and every student.

Another reason for making this project come to life is for there to be more research done in the field. I had a difficult time looking for information on Latinos at colleges and universities, and even more difficult to find were scholarly sources on Latino organizations and Greeks. One of the references I decided to use was Walter M. Kimbrough's Black Greek 101 due to the fact that black and Latino Greeks are similar to each other, and the book has a few pages on the origins of Latino Greeks in the United States. Besides that reference, I also used other scholarly articles to help support my case in the foundation of Latino fraternities and sororities, and the impact they have had on

Latinos at the university. Although there is little research done in this field, I used the few sources I had available as well as make comparisons between African-Americans, since many of their struggles parallel each other, especially when it comes to higher education. Some of the terms used within my interviews must be clearly defined. I use the term “Latino” because I feel that it is the best to encompass those of Latin American descent. I prefer to use this term over “Hispanic” because of the connotations that it might imply. There is debate on how the word originated, but it was widespread by the 1960’s, when those who had some type of origin to the Spanish language were referred as such in the U.S. Census. Hispanic also excludes Brazilians, who mainly speak Portuguese, since the only tie between Hispanics is Spanish. Another term I have to define is the word “political.” While many make reference to actual politics and governmental parties, in this instance I am defining it as, “being active on campus, and making some sort of positive change towards the campus climate as well as the community, whether it is the surrounding one or the neighborhood back home.” These clarifications have been explained to those I interviewed, and have understood its meanings.

The Need for Latino-Based Organizations

In order to analyze the situations minorities undergo, we must go back to where the problems originate: the education system. Conflicting identities is an issue that many minorities have to deal with when arriving to college. There is an issue of “fitting in” and survival, a connection that other researchers have documented among high-achieving, low-income African-American youth. (Valenzuela, Pg. 83) While they might be able to adapt perfectly in their own neighborhood or a similar environment, a predominantly-white campus is much different and must learn to acculturate in some aspects in order to “fit in.” During this transitional period, many students do not have enough of a chance to fulfill their “Americanization” into the culture, and might be typecast as alien or an outcast. With the burden of succeeding in college, financial issues and other factors that might play into the students’ situation, another weight is added to the load that a typical minority must endure.

Many elementary and high schools do not adequately prepare students to move on to the college arena, and ill-equipped, these students are expected to fail. Teachers and counselors play a pivotal role as to how successful the student moving on to obtain a higher degree will eventually be. (Stanton-Salazar, Pg. 188) Some of these role models do not impact their students as much as they should, in which they push their students to excel, and instead only prepare them for graduation and nothing beyond that. Counselors also do not push their students to attain higher standards, as applying to schools that the student would like to go to. Many of those counseling discourage students from even applying, as they do not see them as being successful and actually “making it.” (Stanton-Salazar, Pg. 191)

For those that make it through to college, they must also jump through hurdles in order to obtain a degree. Since the 1964 Civil Rights Act, there have been changes throughout the curriculum at colleges and universities everywhere to accommodate the rising number of minorities coming in. Their missions were basically the same all over: to increase the number of minority students on campus, offer remedial courses for underprepared minority students, to assist in meeting the financial, academic and sociocultural needs of minority students, and offer academic advice and counseling on campus cultural issues.

(Ibarra, Pg. 236-237) Even though these objectives were established over 40 years ago, there was little done to enforce them. Many of the minority students attending the University of Illinois in the early 1990's did not feel welcomed, and they realized that this injustice could not go on, and created coalitions and organizations that would address these issues, and one day make a change for the future of minority students at the university.

Research Questions

When formulating these questions, I wanted to ask them general information to get a feel of how the person is and his/her involvement with issues occurring on campus. I asked them questions like, "Why did you decide to join a Latino Greek-lettered or registered student organization?" to get an individualist look at what are some of the potential reasons of why people decide to get involved with a larger group. Getting to know their organizations was important, and to look at their activity, questions about programming arose. Along with that, I asked to obtain more information about their organization, and how and why it was founded to get the basis of the entire purpose of its existence at the University of Illinois. The term "political" was thrown around, and there were somewhat different definitions for the word, but eventually both the interviewee and I came to a consensus on how it was defined in reference to a college student on campus. Becoming more personal, questions about their own experiences were discussed. Questions on positive experiences were useful, as many of those included culturally-specific programs that made incoming students feel more welcomed to the university. Many of them were open-ended, but some targeted a specific goal: racial discrimination on campus. When talking about positives, the negative experiences also had to be revealed, and everyone had at least one story or issue that they wanted to touch upon. A very important question I made sure to bring up was the 1992 movement at the University of Illinois. I wanted to figure out if students knew anything about it, and if they heard the story correctly. When answering that question, I tied all of their answers together and formulated their last question to end the interview, "Do you think that there should be something similar to what occurred in 1992 now? And why/why not?" With these basic inquiries, I was able to get a sentiment of tension between race and ethnic difference.

Methodology

I interviewed eight students at the University of Illinois inside La Casa Cultural Latina. There were 4 men and 4 women, all ranging from 19 to 23. They have all grown up in a predominantly-Latino neighborhood except for one, and all participants have their closest friends of the same ethnic background. Four out of eight were in a Greek-letter organization, two in a fraternity and two in a sorority. Within each of those groups of two, one member was in a recently-established Greek letter organization and the other was in a group established years ago. The other four were non-Greek and were affiliated with Latino-based organizations, two men and two women. In those groups, one was a member of a recently-established student organization and the other was part of an already-established RSO. Questions asked pertained to their background and

involvement, as well as their interactions with students who were not of their ethnicity. They also dealt with their transition to the university, dealing with culture shock, adaptation to the climate and other factors. Along with that, I obtained a list from La Casa Cultural Latina, the cultural center where all the Latino-based organizations are listed under, in which details the organizations and events they have held on campus over the past several weeks.

The 1992 Protests

The Latina/o population for the state of Illinois in 1993 was approximately 11% and the Latina/o population at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign is 5%. (Latina/o Identity) Coming to the university, many students decide to gain as much knowledge as they can at the U of I, graduate with a degree, and go back to those same neighborhoods they grew up in and teach those in high school and motivate them to move onto college. They also came from neighborhoods infested with gang and drug problems, along with students coming from low-income households where many of their parents worked in factories. The educational system in these areas was not the best, as there was a soaring drop-out rate in high schools. Along with that, those that did excel had the extra pressure of being the translator in the family: they interpreted paperwork and had to pay for the bills, as their immigrant parents did not speak the language. (Latina/o Identity)

Many students at the time came from predominantly-Latino neighborhoods, and it was a culture shock for them to arrive at an institution where there were few like them. Seeing so many that did not dress or talk like them was a bit discouraging, as there was little in common they could discuss. There were many differences, as one student, MariCarmen, pointed out when she overheard one white girl talking; the girl was wondering if she could ask her mom for money, when MariCarmen states that her mother asks her for money. (Latina/o Identity) Even when comparing pictures of their neighborhoods, there was a huge difference. While their houses are in the suburbs and have huge backyards, Latinos live in neighborhoods with small houses and alleys with spray-painted garage doors.

While it is challenging to get into a university like the U of I, it is even harder remaining there. Students that come from these neighborhoods did not have the luxury of having certain resources that many middle- and upper-class people take for granted, and it becomes very difficult for those that, for example, have never used a computer before to take a Computer Science class. Other barriers included contrasting viewpoints and not enough people that can relate to those experiences. Some said it was very arduous to get their point across, for the simple fact that they were talking to people that did not live the same experiences as they have, and could not convey their ideas and thoughts to them because of those contrasting viewpoints. Along with that, cultural houses like La Casa were being under funded, so there were few programs being executed and those that were did not cater to the needs of Latino students at the University of Illinois. These problems were obvious to students, and they came together and decided to take action and demand that their voices be heard.

Graduate and undergraduate students began to set up a list of demands for the

administrators as to what they wanted to see change on campus. They looked into old history of the university, collecting data that would be useful to emphasize the need for transformation of cultural awareness. Some of the demands were increasing the number of Latina/o faculty, improving the recruitment program for Latinos students in urban areas, more funding for cultural programs, a better library of Latino literature, and more Latina/o counselors. With all this prepared, they formed committees to talk to vice chancellors about the issues, but many times they were given the run-around, and sometimes, they were not given a response. In the Spring of 1992, many were frustrated, as their attempts to make a change were shut down by administrators.

On Tuesday May 5, 1992, a few hundred students of different ethnic backgrounds had a sit-in at the Henry Administration building, chanting, "The people, united, will never be divided!" along with other statements. Paul Noble, Associate Vice Chancellor for Administrative Affairs and Director of Campus Security warned those remaining in the building after-hours that they must leave, if not be subject to discipline and/or arrest. The protesters remained, and police were brought in at that time. Unnecessary and excessive force was used to remove the unresisting protesters from the building. Three students were arrested on charges of aggravated battery, resisting arrest and obstruction of justice, and one of them became seriously ill after policemen used a stun gun on him. Even different ethnic protesters were treated differently, as black and Latino students were treated much worse than the white protesters.

Latino Greek Organizations

In 1976, 383,800 Latinos attended college, representing about 3.5 percent of all students. By 1995 the Latino college population had multiplied threefold to 1,166,100, representing 8.2 percent of college students. (Chronicle) In contrast, the Black student college population only increased about 400,000 in total during that time, from 1,033,000 to 1,473,700. (Chronicle) As more and more Latino students began to enroll in college, they saw black and white Greeks on campus and wanted something of their own, a true hermandad for themselves. While there have been Latino-based secret societies in the late 1800's that ran like fraternities, there was no such organization until the 20th century. Phi Iota Alpha was founded December 26, 1931, but their foundation is questionable, due to the fact that the fraternity was based upon an older organization. (Kimbrough, Pg. 178) "The ideology of Pan-Americanism can be summarized as the "unification of all the Latin American nations and all Latin American people." The Fraternity has served as an "Ideological University" through the study and interpretation of Pan-Americanism inspired by the accomplishments of its Five Pillars: Simon Bolivar, Jose de San Martin, Bernardo O'Higgins, Benito Juarez and Jose Marti." (Introduction) Phi Iota Alpha was developed by Latin American exchange students as a club in 1889 and then, after disappearing from the scene in 1973, reemerged as a Greek-lettered fraternity for Latinos in the United States in 1984. (Adam, Pg. 17)

In 1975, there was the birth of the first nationally-recognized Latina sorority and Latino fraternity: Lambda Theta Alpha and Lambda Theta Phi. In 1975, there were no Latino fraternities in existence in the United States. The Greek-letter organizations of the time

primarily catered to Anglo and African-American students and graduates. Lambda's founders, as men of vision, realized there was a need to unite the Latino students, develop their leadership skills, impart upon them the value of an education, and instill in them a commitment to their community and culture. (History, Lambda Theta Phi) In the same year, Lambda Theta Alpha came into existence. There were several causes leading to the realization that such an organization was necessary. Traditionally, the role of the Latina woman was that of maintaining the family institution and falling into the realm of the Machismo stigma. (History, Lambda Theta Alpha) With this new breed of Latino-based Greek organizations, several have sprung up in different areas of the country, and up to now, there are 15 fraternities, 31 sororities, and 6 co-ed fraternities that are Latino-based. (Kimbrough, Pg. 179)

The Interfraternity Council of the University of Illinois (commonly known as the IFC) is the student organization responsible for governing the world's largest collegiate Greek system. The IFC presides over 47 fraternity chapters and more than 3,400 Greek men on campus in an effort to promote the common ideals of brotherhood, scholarship, and service. (Inside IFC: Overview) Although only one Latino-based organization is under this council, the rest are under the umbrella of the United Greek Council, or UGC. With this council, it helped to facilitate their goals of promoting cultural awareness, participating in community service events, and ultimately the advancement of our own communities through the graduation of our members from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. (History, United Greek Council) Within UGC, there are six fraternities (four Latino-based), and nine sororities (six Latino-based).

Only one co-ed fraternity was established on campus during the 80's. During the 1990's, three Latino-based Greek organizations were established at the U of I. From 2000 until 2006, there have been eight established. Here is the chronological list:

Alpha Psi Lambda (May 8, 1988)

Sigma Lambda Beta (April 14, 1991)

Sigma Lambda Gamma (April 10, 1992)

Sigma Iota Alpha (1997)

Lambda Theta Alpha (March 4, 2001)

Lambda Theta Phi (January 17, 2004)

Gamma Phi Omega (December 19, 2004)

Lambda Pi Upsilon (January 2, 2005)

Omega Delta Phi (May 14, 2005)

Lambda Upsilon Lambda (2006)

Omega Phi Beta (April 22, 2006)

Gamma Alpha Omega (July 28, 2006)

Latino-Based Student Organizations

There has been much activity for establishing organizations, especially those that are culturally-specific. There are currently 63 nationally-recognized professional Latino organizations, and over 100 culturally-based Latino organizations. Many of the professional organizations originated at universities, such as SHPE (Society of Hispanic

Professional Engineers) and ALPFA (Association of Latino Professionals in Finance and Accounting). These associations sprouted from the need to have a support structure for Latinos at universities everywhere, and have that home away from home that some do not feel when they enter. The 1960's Chicano Movements triggered the genesis of many new organizations geared towards Latinos on both coasts. Slowly, but surely, they reached the Midwest, and spread their influence among the Latinos at colleges and universities everywhere by the end of the 1990's.

After 2000, there was a flood of new Latino Greeks arriving and more and more new organizations appeared on campus that wanted to see a change on campus, and be more politically-aware of issues at the U of I. La Colectiva Latina sprouted up in 2004 in order for students to deal with issues of injustice, such as anti-immigration sentiment. They hold workshops to demystify such matters and also aid in the surrounding community, which is predominantly Latino. The following year, another organization made its way onto the U of I campus: MEChA (Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán). Five undergrads were helped by graduate student members of MEChA in order to establish their own chapter at the University of Illinois. Those students were in need of a political organization on campus, and sought to have MEChA here to fulfill that yearning.

Tacos and Tequila

Political activity on campus has always been an action that college students take at universities all over the country, but it has been awhile since there was such an impact at the University of Illinois as there was when two organizations decided to throw an exchange. The men of Zeta Beta Tau and Delta Delta Delta held a social on October 5, 2006. The Tri-Delta sorority was under the assumption that it was a "Fiesta" theme, but the men of ZBT were bringing back the long-standing chapter tradition of "Tacos & Tequila" back to the University of Illinois. That night, both organizations went to Station 211, a campus bar, where the men dressed up as "farmers" and wore sombreros while the women dressed up as pregnant "Mexicans" and some even wore the Mexican flag as a skirt.

Both Greek organizations concluded the night's festivities at the ZBT house, which was decorated with a "Mexican theme." A piñata was dangling in one of the rooms, papier-mâché was strung all over the house, and a Mexican flag with an image of the Virgin Mary in the center hung on a wall decorated with ZBT paddles. Although there were some members that were Latina/o in attendance, the issue did not seem to be a huge matter at the party. The more important issue was whether there was enough liquor being served rather than focus on an issue of cultural insensitivity. What they did not know was the controversy their organizations would be involved in, and what reaction the minority students on campus would decide to take against this racially-charged accusation.

Days after the incident, many students began discussing the event amongst each other, and it was being compared to another social that occurred during the spring semester of 2006: "Big Booty Hoes & Ghetto Bros." This social consisted of students, a majority of them white, dressed up in football jerseys, huge gold chains, and hats turned backwards. The women wore men's A-shirts, excessively large chains around their necks, and bandanas tied around their heads. Some of them even stuffed pillows under their shorts to

be perceived as pregnant, similarly to the “Tacos & Tequila” incident. All participants at the “Ghetto Party” also had 40-ounce bottles of beer taped to their hands. Many students, especially African Americans, were outraged at what had occurred at this party, but not much was done to rectify the situation. When “Tacos & Tequila” surfaced, it was the perfect time for minorities at the university to come together and put a halt to the stereotypes perpetuated by the white majority.

Many on campus who heard about the party, like Brian Montes, graduate student, thought the costumes mocked Latinos, in particular Mexicans. "The stereotype of what it is to be Mexican is embodied in these parties," Montes said. "In these parties, to be Mexican means to be a gang member, pregnant or a farm worker." (O’Kelly, Pg. 7A) Around the same time this occurred, a "Ghetto Fabulous" party at the University of Texas School of Law and a "Halloween in the Hood" party at Johns Hopkins University were also brought to the media’s attention, exemplifying that not only is race still an issue but that universities all over the nation were dealing with similar problems as the University of Illinois. In the two months since the exchange, the question of responsibility has fueled the debate over the appropriate response to what is being identified as a larger problem than simply one party. (O’Kelly, Pg. 1A)

News of the event reached Dean of Students William Riley from the Office of Fraternity and Sorority Affairs the Tuesday following the Thursday night party. He responded by asking the Office of Student Conflict Resolution and the Office of Fraternity and Sorority Affairs to investigate what happened. (O’Kelly, Pg. 7A) The Wednesday after the event, Emma Miller, Tri Delta president, received permission to present a formal apology to the United Greek Council, the student governing body for culturally-based organizations on campus. ZBT president, Brandon Keene, who initially had planned to submit a written apology, joined Miller in speaking at the regularly scheduled meeting. (O’Kelly, Pg. 7A) Many at the time saw it was appropriate for Greeks to apologize to Greeks, that it was only a Greek-related issue and not anything larger. The apologies received by the UGC were not genuine or adequate, some of those in attendance for them stated. And others clearly stated that it was not only a Greek issue, but a larger one at that.

Students did not receive a response, so a few students took it upon themselves to discuss what was going on and what should be done about it. Presidents of several cultural-based organizations were contacted to meet up the following week in order to get everyone on the same page as to what was going on. The executive board of the Mexican Student Association (two of those on the board are members of a Greek fraternity) began to set up meetings and dialogue sessions in order to make the student population, as well as faculty and school administrators, aware of what was occurring on campus. Meetings were held at cultural houses like La Casa Cultural Latina and the Bruce D. Nesbitt African American Cultural Center to bring together different communities of peoples and convey that it was not just a Latino issue or not just a minority issue; it is much larger and on a much greater scale. Through these interactions, a coalition was established between African-American and Latino students: S.T.O.P., or Students Transforming Oppression and Privilege.

On October 31, 2006, S.T.O.P. held an anti-racism rally outside of the Illini Union at noon. There, many students and some faculty, voiced their opinions on the feelings of institutionalized racism on campus and how there needed to be a change. With signs reading, “The fight is far from over” and “My culture is not a costume,” hundreds of

students filled the Quad side of the Illini Union for a rally entitled “Breaking the Silence.” (Kantor, Pg. 1A) The purpose of this rally was to get people’s attention, especially administrators, on the racist occurrences on campus and demand that something be done about it. After this was over, several of those in attendance went to picket the Tri Delta and ZBT houses, and finally gathering at Swanlund Administration Building to voice their opinions. When the crowd was gathered at Swanlund, Vice Chancellor of Student Affairs Renee Romano read a letter from Chancellor Richard Herman, which said, in part, that the “Fiesta” exchange was “juvenile” and “insensitive.” (O’Kelly, Pg. 7A) But what has been done about the situation?

On Nov. 28, the University’s Board of Fraternity Affairs and Board of Sorority Affairs announced sanctions against Zeta Beta Tau and Tri Delta for violations of the student code as well as fraternity and sorority rules regarding alcohol. (Riley) The chapters will not be allowed to recruit new members during Spring 2007 and were placed on social probation through Fall 2007, with events where alcohol is present including exchanges and formals prohibited. Both organizations were also placed on conduct probation until the end of Fall 2008 and will be monitored by oversight committees appointed by the Board of Fraternity Affairs and the Board of Sorority Affairs. (Riley) While sanctions have been placed, many say that the university is responsible for these types of events, but until they are held accountable for this, there can be more solutions.

Beyond the classroom, the University’s Strategic Plan for 2006-2011 identifies the institution’s principal challenges and how to address them and calls for the University to “foster an inclusive campus community.” (O’Kelly, Pg. 7A) These quick solutions cannot last either, as there must be an interest for one to actually make a change in their ideals on subjects such as race and identity. Robert Jensen, a University of Texas professor and author of “The Heart of Whiteness: Confronting Race, Racism and White Privilege,” responding to the “Ghetto Fabulous” party at the University of Texas law school, wrote: “The problem with a racist ‘Ghetto Fabulous’ party isn’t that it offends some people or tarnishes the image of UT or may hurt careers. The problem is that it’s racist, and when you engage in such behavior you are deepening the racism of a white-supremacist culture, and that’s wrong.” (Jensen)

Activity On Campus

While there has been plenty of discussion on whether or not Greeks have been active, and a great example was the “Tacos and Tequila” incident. When the event originally occurred, it was being blamed on the Greek system, and it almost seemed as if minority Greeks were being labeled as those who were to blame also. “It’s a Greek issue, not our issue,” commented one of my interviewees. With this point in mind, it would be only fair that the organizations that were part of this event should apologize to the United Greek Council, umbrella council for minority fraternities and sororities. But the Greeks, along with other non-Greeks, were complaining about how they as individuals did not receive a public apology or were acknowledged as one of the people disturbed by the actions of these organizations. “The biggest problem is ignorance,” another interviewee mentioned. But who is at fault for this ignorance?

Many blame the university for the hostile environment, and how they perpetuate these stereotypes by letting these events continue. Seven out of eight participants brought up the “Tacos & Tequila” social, and how it has negatively represented the Latino

community. Slowly, people began to realize that it was not just a Greek issue, but more of a Latino issue. Like the Ghetto Parties, everyone was upset at what they were hearing, but nothing was mentioned about taking action. A few members of a Greek fraternity began to contact others, and eventually brought more people in as meetings progressed. The word was out there, and more people from politically-conscious backgrounds began jumping on board, and slowly the Greek influence was dissipating. Eventually, only a handful of people that were in Greek organizations have been consistently been working on progress towards positive change on campus.

Looking through the list of programs hosted by organizations, there seems to be an interesting difference. When it comes to community service, Greek organizations have fewer but larger events, while non-Greek organizations have smaller but consistent programming. Two Greek organizations, for example, came together and reserved the cultural center for an entire day to dedicate to a Christmas party for the children of the neighboring area Shadowwood. At this event, there was food prepared, activities planned and presents ready to be distributed. At the end, there was even a piñata for the kids to break, full of candies and treats. Many of the non-Greek organizations have weekly programs, usually on Saturdays, in which they present activities or mentoring for younger kids. They provide a simple lunch and several activities that help them out with their studies or their relations with their mentors.

A few of the people that were interviewed were also somehow involved in what has been going on with the recent protests against “Tacos & Tequila” and how they have modeled their steps toward this issue with the ones that protesters used in 1992. “Everything happened gradually,” one of the participants stated. “We had contacted vice chancellors and administrators, even reported some of the incidents to the Office of Minority Student Affairs, and nothing was really done about the situation.” When their cries fell on deaf ears, students were upset, and it seemed that the only way to get administration’s attention was to hold a rally to express their opinions.

Besides this event, other subtle forms of discrimination have been encountered. From people giving students odd looks when walking by, the clutching of purses and speeding away from people, and the muttering under one’s breath were all common. To ensure that these individuals would be in a safe environment, they joined Greek-lettered RSO’s and student organizations in order to associate with others like themselves, someone that could understand their struggle. The support structure is being continued today, as all of the organizations that have begun are still around, but it seems that different types of Latinos are entering the university and these support structures only cater to a certain type of Latino, so more begin to form. Times are different from the ‘90’s, and there are different factors one must consider, as technology is becoming more prevalent than before, which makes information more widespread. But it seems that the same struggles students endured just over a decade ago are still fights that we, as students, continue to struggle with.

Conclusion

There must be some type of struggle in order to fully appreciate things that have always been available to people. Through tough times, people come together and fight for a noble cause. After the fight is over, the war seems nonexistent and complacency takes over. As that occurs, divisions begin to form that will eventually segregate groups within

groups. With the history of organizations, the stories told about protests, and the perceptions of students on this campus, it seems that Greeks have become the motivators of such change. They are the poster children of revolution and the marketers of change. To be a Greek is to lead, as they have more than enough experience being in leadership positions and having their image out there. Their events grab attention from people everywhere, and those that pay close attention can see the hard work put behind it. The ongoing struggle is continued by those of the non-Greek community. They might not get the recognition they deserve, as they might not have a specific image put out for their organization as of yet, but they continue to make a difference and not mind if their name is out there or not. Although Greeks might trigger something in all of us, it is those that dedicate their time and energy to keep hope alive that make the difference every day. Although some Greeks might begin a movement, they might not have the time and dedication to continue, as they will spread themselves out too much, depending on how active they might be. Those not affiliated with the Greek life put more effort, not only because of their own individualistic goals, but because they do not want future generations struggle with what they have undergone.

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As a reference, I will be using Javaris Pratt's "Do Black Greek Letter Organizations affect the social and political awareness of the University of Illinois Campus?" This inquiry page will aid me in producing methods of obtaining information on culturally-based organizations and how their history has affected any type of social and/or political movement at the University of Illinois. I will also use this as a source to obtain more information on minority Greek-lettered organizations, as there is very little research done on Latino Greeks in general.

THE NEW GREEKS AT FRATERNITIES AND SORORITIES SUCH AS LAMBDA
PHI EPSILON AND SIGMA IOTA ALPHA, LATINOS AND ASIAN-AMERICANS
CAN FIND THEIR NICHE

Published on February 8, 2000

Author(s): Vanessa E. Jones, Globe Staff

This article can help somewhat in obtaining experience of those that might join minority-based Greek organizations, but am unable to access the article.