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## Relationship Statements

*The North American Interfraternity Conference (NIC), through its President & CEO, takes a position on each of the critical issues within the fraternity industry.*

Relationship statements and recognition agreements that attempt to specially and specifically define the relationship between fraternities and host institutions are not uncommon in today's educational environment. The NIC is committed to collaborating with college and university partners in the development and implementation of these statements and agreements to ensure a mutually beneficial experience for both the institution and the member fraternities.

### **Relationship Statements**

Generally relationship statements and recognition agreements are a document that outlines institutional expectations of fraternal organizations for college or university recognition as well as the benefits that are conveyed to the organization upon recognition. Some agreements may be used as a tool to evaluate organizational performance and continued recognition as an organization in good standing.

Formal agreements and statements are nothing new, and based on NIC research, date back to at least 1938, when the Association of American Colleges and the NIC adopted a document entitled "A Definition of the Reciprocal Relations between College and Fraternity." The issue was also present at the 1964 Annual Meeting of the NIC House of Delegates when the NIC, in conjunction with the FEA and NASPA, issued a joint statement regarding the matter. There were a series of resolutions in 1981, 1984, 1985, and 1989 as well. This perspective is important as it illustrates that these documents and this issue will not disappear; but rather, illustrates the need for the fraternal community and higher education to work collaboratively to establish guidelines and documents that respect the rights of students and fraternities, while complying with NIC Standards.

The NIC believes men's fraternities work to create comprehensive environments that allow members to engage in a high level of experiential learning and leadership development. Additionally, NIC member fraternities have set forth their own values and operational guidelines to ensure chapters meet organizational standards and strive for the best interest of members and fraternity life. These organizational expectations are further supported by the expectations outlined in the NIC Standards. The execution of these standards and principles are what fuel the identity and success of NIC member organizations.

Often times, relationship statements and recognition agreements are proposed and developed in response to a series of behavioral concerns with the fraternity community. The NIC is supportive of institutional efforts to address and create culture change within a fraternity community, but does not support methods that create inequity in the application of student policy by requiring fraternities to uphold policies that are not expected of any other group of students.

### **What behavior should the university expect of fraternities?**

Colleges and universities should expect fraternities to meet the expectations that are required for all student organizations, as well as to meet the minimum standards outlined by the member fraternity and through the NIC Standards. In some cases, relationship statements have become a means of requiring organizations to operate in a specific way. The NIC is opposed to university policies requiring a minimum number of community service hours per man, mandatory attendance at events, compulsory membership in additional student organizations, and other expectations that exist only for the students who have chosen a fraternity as part of their collegiate experience.

The NIC takes this position not because we are opposed to community service or a well-rounded co-curricular education, rather just the opposite. On a typical campus the members of fraternities are among the most involved and the highly motivated. In cases where this is present the NIC believes the decision to involve oneself in additional activities is the choice of the student and should not be used as a requirement for recognition or accreditation beyond what is required for any other student or type of organization.

Additionally, membership in the North American Interfraternity Conference requires each member organization to adhere to NIC Standards. Campus advisors and administrators should take action by contacting the inter/national organization and the NIC in a situation where a member organization is failing to meet the Standards set forth by the member organization or the NIC. It is through communication and collaboration that positive changes occur, not through a new set of policies or requirements.

### **What is the problem with an accreditation process which rewards success?**

The NIC is supportive of incentive-based processes that reward outstanding performance and recognize achievement. Furthermore, the NIC supports college/university administrators, Interfraternity Councils, and NIC members by reviewing accreditation materials to ensure that equal, self-governing processes are still at the forefront of campus and member organization operations.

Accreditation programs that are tied to recognition cannot be supported by the NIC as they reach beyond the goal of serving as an incentive based process that rewards excellence. Linking accreditation programs to the recognition of fraternities is an inequitable application of student policy. The stated objective of such recognition processes can be achieved through the collaborative expectations that already exist via student organization registration and recognition processes, member fraternity expectations, and the NIC Standards.

### **Does the NIC provide a template or recommended language for Relationship Statements?**

The NIC does not provide a template, as we believe that the Code of Student Conduct and the normal recognition or registration process that the institution uses for all student organizations should govern recognition. As the NIC reviews language for statements and agreements, we look for and support language that is equitable and based in the code of conduct. The NIC is supportive of the following types of expectations:

- Compliance with university policy and the code of student conduct
- Compliance with organizational policies, standards, and governing documents
- Compliance with local, state, and federal law
- Housing that is compliant with local code requirements and has regular fire and safety inspections

In many instances, institutions require undergraduate leaders to sign relationship statements and/or recognition agreements. For many NIC members, undergraduate leaders are unable to sign such documents on behalf of the organization, so we recommend that in cases that require an organizational signature, that signature be obtained from the executive director or designee.

### **What role can Interfraternity Council play in the development of expectations?**

As a body that is representative of the fraternity community, the IFC is empowered to create and enforce behavioral expectations for its member fraternities. The power of IFC is invested in its member fraternities, and many of the behavioral expectations that colleges and universities include in relationship statements and recognition agreements are fully under the purview of a functioning Interfraternity Council. IFC can and should be developing expectations related, but not limited to behavior, community outreach, and educational programming.

Through this self-governance process, it is important to ensure that any agreement does not include policies or procedures which are out of compliance with the policies and procedures of the charter granting organizations. Specifically, restrictions on recruitment, expansion, and independent operations of chapters cannot be supported by the NIC or its member fraternities.

### **Developing a Relationship Statement / Recognition Agreement**

The partnership and relationships that exist between higher education and interfraternal partners are critical to the success of the fraternal movement. With this, the NIC encourages any institution that is considering the development of a relationship statement or recognition agreement to communicate and work collaboratively with the NIC as well as the inter/national organizations in the community. Ongoing and early communication allows all parties to work together in the spirit of partnership and collaboration.