



Twenty Years of the IFC on the Hill: A Legacy of Leadership and Growth

(For immediate release)

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May 16, 2025 was the twentieth anniversary of the filing in the office of the Colorado Secretary of State of the articles of incorporation creating the Undergraduate Interfraternity Council at the University of Colorado, Inc. (the “IFC on the Hill”). The IFC on the Hill was the first fraternity community which was independent of the academic institution which its members attended as students. The IFC on the Hill was also unique because it was the first fraternity community to be run entirely by the students who were members of its’ chapters. Early on, the Greek world referred to this as the “Boulder Experiment.” As success and growth occurred, the IFC on the Hill became known as the “Boulder Experience.”

Born out of Tragedy.

How did the IFC on the Hill come about? It began in a tragedy, the death of a fraternity pledge in Boulder, Gordie Bailey. The University of Colorado was shocked and embarrassed about Bailey’s death. Furthermore, the University was surprised to find that it had no control or jurisdiction over the tragedy because Greek letter organizations were not student organizations. The University of Colorado had stopped recognizing Greek letter organizations in 1965. (n.1).

The 1999 death of Amanda McDonald, a sorority member, did not provide the University with any foreshadowing of the lack of control. McDonald, and her boyfriend left a party at his fraternity. The two drove in his vehicle to the top of Flagstaff Mountain. Once at the top of Flagstaff, McDonald decided to mount the snowboard in the rack on the top of her boyfriend's vehicle to ride down Flagstaff Mountain that way. Unfortunately, the vehicle rolled, and McDonald was killed.

The one power the University held in 1999 was the power of moral suasion. In an attempt to put an end to fraternity parties, the University held a three-day weekend session of many adults trying to badger the undergraduate fraternity and sorority members into changing their behaviors. The weekend was not very effective and had little long-term impact. (n.2.)

In 2004, Bailey died of alcohol poisoning because of alcohol he consumed as part of a pledge event at his fraternity. Bailey's death was not a drunken driving death but instead was a hazing death. The University of Colorado, led, by Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs Ron Stump, made demands on the Greek letter organization to give the University control over those organizations. This demanded relinquishment of control was not accompanied by any responsibility or quid pro quo from the University. The University insisted on requirements that would have been severely detrimental, if not fatal, for the Greek letter organizations, such as no recruitment until sophomore year. (n.3.) A requirement for a full-time professional house director would have been a real problem for chapters occupying the old, converted single family residences on the Hill in Boulder. (n.4)

Negotiations with the University on behalf of the Greek letter organizations was done by a team led by Jon Williamson, the head of the North American Interfraternity Conference and included senior fraternity executives. After a year of negotiations had produced no agreement,

Jon Williamson reached out to Michael Smith, who had been advising a Greek letter chapter in Boulder since the late 1980s. (n.5.) Williamson's instructions to Smith were: "We are getting nowhere with the University. So do what you can."

Smith decided that, since fraternities were founded by 19- and 20-year-old young men, it would make more sense for fraternity communities to be run by their 19- and 20-year-old members. Smith had no background in higher education, so the traditional model of fraternity management at universities had not influenced him. (n.6.)

Role of Marc Stine

When created, the IFC on the Hill had fourteen chapters with a total of seven hundred members. Alumni who were working with those chapters determined that an adult presence would be valuable. The alumni group reached out to Marc Stine, a member of Zeta Beta Tau, who had decades of experience as a volunteer for his fraternity. Professionally, Stine was a retired high school principal and coach. Stine chose as the job title "Greek Advocate" to reflect that the holder of that position did not hold any vote or power in the IFC on the Hill. All planning, decisions, execution, enforcement, and evaluation was and is solely the province of the undergraduate officers and chapter presidents.

Brothers and Cousins

Stine's maturity and experience proved to be tremendous assets to the fledgling IFC on the Hill. The most important principle in the operation of the IFC on the Hill is the concept of "brothers and cousins." Stine showed the undergraduates that each Greek letter organization was far more like the other Greek letter organizations than it was different. The undergraduate

members of each Greek letter organization could see they were part of the larger community of all the Greek letter organizations. The failure of a single chapter was a detriment to the whole community. And the failure of a single brother damages every brother in every chapter.

Relationship with Boulder Police Department

The IFC on the Hill maintains a positive and cooperative relationship with the Boulder Police Department, especially the officers assigned to the Hill. Early on, the Boulder police department worked with Stine and the leadership of the IFC on the Hill to develop and implement the “Call 911” program. Students are to “Call 911” if any person is in distress, and hand that person to the emergency service professionals. This changed the operating ethic from concealing problems to getting people to help. “Call 911” was 180 degrees difference from all other Greek letter communities at the time.

Each chapter is assigned a specific police officer as a liaison, who becomes a friend of many in the chapter. That has reduced the tensions that traditionally occur between police and Greek letter organizations on other campuses.

The IFC on the Hill has established a series of blackout dates, on which no IFC on the Hill chapter will hold a social event. These dates are Halloween, New Year’s Eve, and St. Patrick’s Day, among others. Blackout dates are dates which attract many nonstudents to social events in Boulder. Those nonstudents are not subject to university oversight, chapter rules or IFC on the Hill rules. Events on these dates had become a huge problem without any benefits. The blackout dates also reduce the burden on the police department.

In recognition of the partnership nature of this relationship, the IFC on the Hill president has been invited to a member of the board of directors of the Boulder Police Foundation. The IFC on the Hill regularly raises money for the Boulder Police Foundation.

Boulder Fire Department

The other Boulder city department that became critical to the IFC on the Hill is the Boulder Fire Department. Most of the IFC on the Hill chapters live in elderly converted residences that are, quite frankly, firetraps. Regular inspections and fire drills became a regular part of life in the IFC on the Hill.

Important Educational Events

The IFC on the Hill and Stine created several educational events that provide a solid foundation for the IFC on the Hill. The first event is “Safe Chapters,” which so the first event of each semester. Each chapter is required to send all chapter officers to Safe Chapters. The presenters at Safe Chapters are the Boulder Police Department, the Boulder Fire Departments, the Boulder EMTs, and the IFC Officers. The presentations at Safe Chapters review all the rules and laws that will govern social events hosted by fraternities. A chapter may not hold any social function until that chapter’s officers have attended Safe Chapters. Safe Chapters provides all chapters with the same rules, laws, and enforcement expectations.

The second educational event critical to the success of the IFC on the Hill is Greek 101. Greek 101 occurs on the day after that semester’s new members have accepted their bids. No

chapter may hold social events with its new members until all new members and all chapter officers have attended Greek 101. In the early years, In the beginning, Greek 101 covered the FIPG guidelines, local and state law, and how enforcement would occur. The Call 911 program is emphasized. The IFC on Hill's policy against hazing is reviewed.

Over the twenty years, a number of components have been added to Greek 101. The first was the segment on sexual assault and consent. (n.7.)

The most recent addition to Greek 101 is a segment on suicide. This was added after several chapters experienced a loss due to suicide. Additionally, each semester the IFC on the Hill holds a contest for a "Call 988" poster that goes up in all the Greek letter properties in the IFC on the Hill.

Greek 101 provides all new members with the same set of rules, standards, and expectations. There is no difference just because men belong to different chapters. Doing this education at the very start of the semester prevents anyone from claiming a lack of knowledge.

Recruitment

From the very beginning, recruitment by the IFC on the Hill has been successful. Each year, the Fall and Spring recruitment numbers set a record. In 1996, the fall recruitment of 396 new members set a record for the University. Fall 2024 recruitment totaled seven hundred new members. The IFC on the Hill has grown from fourteen chapters with seven hundred men, to twenty-two chapters with 2500 men. No other fraternity community in the country can match this growth. The IFC on the Hill average chapter size of over one hundred is the largest of any fraternity community west of the Mississippi River.

Academics

The IFC on the Hill has an extraordinarily strong commitment to academic performance and is working extremely hard to have the IFC on the Hill GPA higher than the all men's GPA at CU. To this end, each semester, the IFC on the Hill sets a date by which initiations and all other fraternity activities must be completed so that the members can prepare for and take finals without distraction.

Independent of the University of Colorado

Even though the University has not had an official relationship with fraternities since 1965, the University has, on a number of occasions, taken actions to harm or interfere with the operations of the IFC on the Hill. With rare exceptions, the University has never seen fit to laud the work of its students in development, operating, managing, and policing the most successful fraternity community in the United States. In fact, in 2015, CU decided that the University needed a fraternity community of its own, despite the ongoing success and good example of the IFC on the Hill. The IFC on the Hill does not cost CU a penny. The IFC on the Hill is treated as an outside third party for many University functions. Even though every member of the IFC on the Hill is a student, they cannot rent rooms at student rates but must pay third party rates.

Summary

One of the ongoing themes to the governance of the IFC on the Hill is the concept of community. Each chapter is part of the larger whole. And all chapters and the IFC on the Hill are part of the larger Hill and Boulder communities. (n.8.) The IFC on the Hill develops Fraternity Men. There is no place for a “frat boy.”

n.1. The very liberal University was afraid that conservative fraternities might support the war in Vietnam. The fraternity community drifted for decades. Finally, in the late 1980s or early 1990s, the University hired several student affairs staff members to work with the Greek community, but the University still had no control or regulation over Greek letter groups because Greek letter groups were not recognized student organizations.

n.2. This analysis is from Michael Smith, who participated this weekend as a long-standing chapter advisor.

n.3. Sophomore year recruiting would have been the death knell for any Greek letter housing in Boulder. The stock of Greek letter housing, on the Hill, or on Grandview Terrace, had already suffered significant losses during the 60s, 70s, and eighties.

n.4. There has never been a definition or job description for a full-time professional house director. In addition, for the many groups occupying converted residences on the Hill, there was no space for a house director.

n.5. Smith was a lawyer and was the adult volunteer with the longest time in the Boulder Greek letter organization community.

n.6. Based on conversations with Smith.

n.7. See IFC on the Hill Implements Comprehensive Sexual Assault and Consent Training: Significant Safety Improvements Result.

n.8. The IFC on the Hill began working with the neighborhood association for the Hill in Boulder three years ago. The representatives of the IFC on the Hill were the first students to participate in that forum.