

The History of Sigma Phi Epsilon

The Second 50 Years

The 1950s

After 34 years as the Fraternity's first Grand Secretary, Uncle Billy retired in 1942. The National Board of Directors appointed Herb Heilig, Lawrence University (Wisconsin Alpha), '23, to take Brother Phillips' place as Grand Secretary. Serving for two difficult years during World War II, Brother Heilig laid the groundwork for the Fraternity's post-war rebuilding program. He resigned in 1944.

The Board then appointed William W. Hindman, Jr., Pennsylvania (Pennsylvania Delta), '39, to the position of Grand Secretary, in which he served for 13 years. Brother Hindman was instrumental in establishing 51 new chapters during the 1950s.

By 1959, Sigma Phi Epsilon had 148 active chapters. With the Fraternity's rapid expansion, the leadership at Headquarters once again changed with Bedford W. Black, Wake Forest University (North Carolina Zeta), '41, taking over after the retirement of Bill Hindman. Bedford Black's charge was to determine how the Headquarters should best be organized to operate Sigma Phi Epsilon as an emerging "large fraternity." Richard F. Whiteman, Syracuse University (New York Alpha), '54, a member of the Headquarters staff at the time, was selected to lead the Fraternity as its Executive Director. Succeeding Brother Whiteman was Donald M. Johnson, an alumnus of the University of Kansas (Kansas Gamma), '45, who had been in business in Colorado at the time of his appointment. Brother Johnson brought to the Headquarters staff the business skills he had acquired. During his tenure from 1961 to 1971, he implemented many organizational changes at Headquarters, including the enlargement of the professional staff.

The 1960s

Sigma Phi Epsilon chartered 33 new chapters between 1960 and 1969, and membership reached its highest levels. In 1968, the College Survey Bureau reported that 59% of the 173 chapters were among the top chapters on their campuses.

The 1960s began with Sigma Phi Epsilon making the transition to a more business-like operation, necessitated by its dramatic growth during the 1950s. During this time, the professional staff located in Richmond, Virginia, grew and became more specialized in developing an array of services for undergraduate chapters. The most significant event of the 1960s was the emergence of J. Edward Zollinger, College of William & Mary (Virginia Delta), '27, as the leader of the Sigma Phi Epsilon Educational Foundation and the Fraternity. He served the Fraternity as Grand President from 1967 to 1971. "Zolly" came from the successful IBM Corporation, serving as assistant to the founder of IBM, where he was involved in developing IBM's corporate culture.



The successful experience of Ed Zollinger in the business world and the stability of a long-term professional staff in Richmond brought together ingredients necessary for Sigma Phi Epsilon's emergence as a leader among all national fraternities in the 1970s. It was the vision of excellence and the personal dedication to that vision which made Ed Zollinger unique. Sigma Phi Epsilon was committed to the future.

The 1970s

In 1971, the National Board of Directors divided Headquarters responsibilities between the areas of alumni operations, undergraduate operations and financial operations, appointing Charles N. White, Jr., of Western Michigan (Michigan Beta), '62, to the undergraduate and financial areas as Executive Vice President. Donald M. Johnson assumed responsibility for the alumni and Foundation areas, also as Executive Vice President.



This organizational structure continued until 1976 upon the retirement of Brother Johnson, at which time Brother White was named Executive Director and was responsible for the entire Headquarters operation. During Brother White's tenure, the Regional Leadership Academy program was created and instituted, the professional Headquarters staff was expanded, and its responsibilities enlarged.

The late 1960s and early 1970s were difficult times. Fraternities began losing their popularity. A generation wary of established institutions was arriving on campus and many of them scorned the Greek system as elitist, outdated, and immature. Unfortunately, enough fraternity chapters behaved in such a way that the charge stuck.

The "student movement," centered on the war in Vietnam, alienated fraternity chapters still further. Faced with a breakdown of campus and chapter values, many chapters of Sigma Phi Epsilon and of other fraternities lost direction. Men were no longer attracted to membership. None of the old recruitment formulas seemed to work. Some of SigEp's oldest and strongest chapters died during this era because they refused to adapt.

By 1972, Sigma Phi Epsilon chapters were suffering. The number of members decreased, and alumni support was weakening—college students of the time were bucking traditions and the ways of "anyone over 30." The Fraternity's Headquarters went into deficit financial operation, but the Board of Directors and the Executive Director refused to cut back on the service to undergraduate chapters. The strength of SigEp over the years has been a function of alumni guidance and Headquarters services to the undergraduate chapters. That devotion to service pulled SigEp through the early 1970s with fewer scars than most other strong fraternities.

The investment in the belief that the hard times would come to an end paid off. In the late 1970s, students began to change—demanding a return to the ideals of a past generation. Fraternities were again in prime position to meet those needs and SigEp was ready.

The 1980s

The growth of the late 1970s continued into the first half of the 1980s and did not show any signs of slowing. Sigma Phi Epsilon held its strongest position ever, with 250 chapters in 45 states. With 16,000 undergraduates on college campuses, 170,000 lifetime members, and more men joining than any other fraternity, SigEp became the strongest and most popular fraternity in history.

During the 1970s and 1980s, a commitment to undergraduates and undergraduate housing emerged as a central theme with special emphasis on long-term financial stability. Sigma Phi Epsilon's leadership in the interfraternity world was acknowledged as it led all fraternities in innovative approaches to programming and undergraduate development.

In 1987, Kenneth S. Maddox, Oregon State University (Oregon Alpha), '75, was named Executive Director, and Brother White began full-time management of the Educational Foundation as its President. A commitment to alumni began to emerge from the Headquarters operation through a focused plan to develop the Sigma Phi Epsilon Educational Foundation as a primary resource for the Fraternity's future. The Fraternity has benefited greatly from the increased strength of the Educational Foundation.

A number of important initiatives began at the close of the decade. In 1987 the Self-Esteem Committee met under the leadership of Past Grand President Donald C. McCleary, University of Texas (Texas Alpha), '71, to discuss issues facing the Fraternity. The Self-Esteem Committee developed some of the concepts for the Balanced Man Program, a membership development program aimed at preserving Sigma Phi Epsilon's values while providing for the needs of its members. In 1989, the Fraternity developed the first formalized strategic plan—a detailed blueprint designed to take the Fraternity into the next millennium as the premier Greek-letter organization.

The 1990s

The 1990s have marked a major shift in the Greek world. The negative reputation of Greek life earned by fraternities during the 1970s and 1980s resulted in declining membership and dramatically increasing insurance costs for all organizations. Yet through this time of turmoil in the interfraternity world, Sigma Phi Epsilon remained the largest and fastest growing fraternity in history. As the founding member of the Fraternity Insurance Purchasing Group (FIPG) in the 1980s, Sigma Phi Epsilon was instrumental in leading the Greek community to better risk management practices.

The Fraternity's Educational Foundation continued to support undergraduates and innovative programs. It took a giant step by completing the \$5 million Campaign for the Heart in 1993. This was SigEp's largest fund-raising effort to date, and it enabled SigEp undergraduates to enhance leadership and scholarship skills for the 1990s and beyond. Through a leadership gift from Curtis L. Carlson, University of Minnesota (Minnesota Alpha), '37, the Regional Leadership Academies were renamed in his honor. They are now known as the Carlson Leadership Academies.

A membership program unique among college fraternities was established with Grand Chapter legislation in 1991—the Balanced Man Program. This program is based on individual growth through academic excellence, enhanced life skills, chapter leadership, mentoring, and service in the community.

In March of 1996, Brother Maddox announced his intentions to return to his home state of Oregon. The National Board of Directors selected Jacques L. Vauclain, III, Davidson College (North Carolina Epsilon), '91, to succeed Brother Maddox as Executive Director.