

Chapter 4: Maintaining Records and Resources

Chapter Academic Files

An effective scholarship program requires that certain types of records and resource information be maintained. These include grade point average data, individual academic profiles of members, and course and instructor evaluations.

Grade Point Average Data

The Scholarship Chair needs to keep on file the chapter's grade point average for the previous semester, along with the ranking of all other chapters on campus. In addition, the grade point averages of each individual member and pledge/associate member needs to be kept on file. Most colleges and universities provide a system to release an individual's grades if the person has signed an authorization for release of grades. Consult your Greek Life Advisor for the proper procedures and forms. If you use Academic Goal Setting Forms (refer to Chapter 2), you will also want to keep those forms on file.

Academic Profiles

A more comprehensive scholarship program will require that more specific academic profiles be established on each member. To established academic profiles, request each member to voluntarily submit a copy of his/her transcript (an unofficial copy is sufficient). Once established the profiles can be updated each semester by requesting members to turn in a photocopy of their grade reports. If possible, the academic profiles should be computerized, utilizing file management software. Fields to be entered are: member's name, telephone number, major/minor, semester grade point average, cumulative grade point average, course number, units, instructor, and grade. Once entered, it is easy to sort the information and prepare various reports. Ideally, the chapter will own or otherwise have access to a personal computer, so that the academic profiles can easily be updated by successive Scholarship Committees.

Confidentiality of Individual Academic Records

Important: Individualized academic information must be kept confidential. The chapter should be informed of which members have not met the required academic standards of the fraternity, however, specific grade point averages should not be disclosed. An acceptable exception is announcing the grade point averages of academic award winners. The records and/or computer disks should be kept in a secure, locked file, with access restricted to designated members of the Scholarship Committee, the President, the Chapter Advisor and the Faculty Advisor. The release of a student's academic records to others, without his/her prior consent, or the use of the information for any other purpose than that specifically intended is prohibited by federal law.

Course and Instructor Files

Most colleges and universities require faculty members to prepare a syllabus for each course. Standard information one might find in syllabi include a description of the course content and scope, prerequisites, required text(s) and materials, reading assignments, grading methods (percent of grade determined by homework assignments, class participation, reports and term papers, lab work, tests, quizzes, mid-term examinations, final examination, etc.), grading policies, attendance requirements, schedule of assignments and tests, the instructor's office hours, and other information. Typically, syllabi are distributed to students on the first day of class.

Because they are more complete than the brief course description contained in the general catalog, syllabi can be very useful to students in selecting courses and instructors to take during the next semester. For that reason, it is advisable for the Scholarship Committee to keep a file of course syllabi available to members. The best way is to keep them in three-ring binders, in order by course name/number. This way they can be easily updated. Request that your members submit copies of the syllabi from their courses. The easiest system is to ask each member to get two copies of each syllabus on the first day of class -- one for himself/herself and one for the file. Some department offices may also have copies of syllabi available.

Another useful service the Scholarship Committee can provide is a file of course and instructor evaluation completed by members. These can be valuable in assisting members in selecting classes. The Scholarship Committee should stress that the purpose of the file is not for members to choose the easiest classes, but to identify the most beneficial courses and the instructors with the best teaching abilities. The Course and Instructor Evaluation Forms (see Exhibit 4B) should be completed late in the semester, but early enough for them to be collected and filed before class registration begins for the next semester. These forms should also be kept in three-ring binders, in order by course name/number. It is also helpful to have a cross reference by instructor's last name.

Test and Term Paper Files

The maintenance of chapter test and term paper files poses several ethical and educational problems. The use of such files tends to promote academic dishonesty. The following definitions of "cheating" and "plagiarism" are typical of the definitions recognized by most institutions of higher education:

Cheating . . . is defined as the act of obtaining or attempting to obtain credit for academic work by the use of any dishonest, deceptive, or fraudulent means. Examples of cheating include, but are not limited to: copying, in whole or in part, from another's test or examination; discussing answers or ideas relating to the answers on a test or other examination when such discussion is prohibited by the instructor; obtaining copies of a test, an examination, or other course material without the permission of the instructor; using notes, "cheat sheets" or other devices considered inappropriate under the prescribed testing condition; collaborating with another or others in work to be presented, contrary to the stated rules for the course; falsifying records, laboratory work, or other course data; submitting work previously presented in another course, if contrary to the rules of the course; altering or interfering with the grading procedures; plagiarizing, as defined; and knowingly and intentionally assisting another student in any of the above.

Plagiarism . . . [is] defined as the act of incorporating ideas, words, or specific substance of another, whether purchased, borrowed, or otherwise obtained, and submitting same . . . as one's work to fulfill academic requirements without giving credit to the appropriate source. Examples of plagiarism include, but are not limited to: submitting work, either in part or in whole,

completed by another; omitting footnotes for ideas, statements, fact, or conclusions which belong to another; omitting quotation marks when quoting directly from another; and submitting artistic works, such as musical compositions, photographs, paintings, drawings, and sculptures, of another.

Source: San Diego State University Policy File, 1998. Emphasis added.

By this definition, therefore, maintaining test files, unless the instructors have specifically authorized the use of the tests for that purpose, constitutes cheating. Use of such a test file can result in disciplinary action taken by the college or university against members, and maintenance of the file can result in the college or university taking disciplinary action against the chapter. Further, regardless of whether the test files fall within the technical definition of cheating on your campus, other ethical and educational issues are involved. By having access to material not available to other students in a class fraternity/sorority members are being given an unfair advantage. Students who use test files end up trying to memorize answers for tests rather than learning the important course concepts. Finally, the mere existence of these files contributes to the often negative attitudes many faculty members have toward fraternities and sororities. Some argue that test files give students an idea of the instructor's testing style. In reality, most instructors, especially if asked, will be quite specific in terms of the type of test questions they ask, the relative importance of material, and how to best prepare for the test.

If your chapter is intent on having a test file, two requirements are strongly recommended for accepting tests. First, the instructor must have authorized the chapter to have the test on file. In fact, some instructors are willing to give out old tests for students to use as study aids. It is more likely that instructors who give quantitative tests where students calculate numerical answers to problems, as is common in mathematics, statistics, accounting, and some science classes, will supply sample tests. Second, the tests should not have the answers written on them. The purpose of a sample test is for students to learn the material by reviewing notes and practicing problems, not for rote memorization. While test files meeting these criteria are acceptable, keeping semester paper files clearly promotes plagiarism and therefore cannot be justified.