



Ten Activities to Build Brotherhood

Finding meaningful and fun activities for use in a closing pledge week, throughout the semester, during pledge meetings, pledge retreats and even for chapter retreats can be a daunting task. Here are ten quality activities that will keep your members engaged while building brotherhood, community, respect, and chapter unity.

1. Two Truths & A Lie - traditional
2. Carousels – NIC
3. Maze – NIC
4. Yurt Circle - traditional
5. Team Beam – NIC
6. Electric Fence – Western Illinois Univ. / Horn's Lodge Teams Course
7. Helium Hoop – NIC / UIFI
8. In the Bonds / Gavel Pass - traditional
9. Reverse Gavel Pass - traditional
10. In the Bonds – Question – Iowa Chi (Northern Iowa)

For a collection of over 50 great team builders and chapter activities, check out the Brotherhood Building Activities collection from the National Interfraternity Conference.

<http://www.nicindy.org/resources/ResourcessAnddServices.pdf>

Two Truths & a Lie

Instructions:

- Each participant should think of two interesting or possibly “unbelievable” facts about himself, and one made-up fact about himself.
- Each participant will then stand up, say his name and share the three facts in random order.
- Members of the group then guess which fact they think was made up. The participant then reveals which of the three facts was false. Another member stands up and shares his name and three facts, and the process continues until all members have shared their “Two Truths and a Lie.”

Outcome:

- Two Truths and a Lie is a quick way to break the ice and begin forming friendships through self-disclosure
- The activity can become a sort of competition, and many members will find this means of disclosure more fun than a question and response session.
- Members will begin to see how diverse their fraternity culture really is.

Carousels

Instructions:

- All chapter members should make one large circle. Instruct members to count off by twos. Ask all ones to take one step inside the circle and face out, thus facing one of their brothers on the outside circle. This step should form two circles. Make sure each has a discussion partner.
- Instruct the men that they will be given a topic that they will discuss with their partner for 60 seconds. Each partner should share during that time. Let them know that you as the leader will let them know when their time is up.
- Ask all to stop talking when their time is up. Instruct the inside circle to move one person to their right. All members should now have a different discussion partner. Give them another topic. Continue through the following questions.
 - Initially, what drew you to our fraternity?
 - What is brotherhood?
 - How do you define respect?
 - What is your favorite brotherhood building activity?
 - I am most proud of this fraternity because...
 - A brother is considering dropping out of school and the chapter. What would you say to him?
 - What is trust?
 - What do you enjoy most about our fraternity?
 - Finish the sentence: I feel closest to my brothers when...
 - I am most frustrated with our chapter when...
 - The most important aspect of our fraternity is...
- Take some time to discuss these topics in the large group

Outcome:

- Chapter members who don't normally share these insights with each other will have a safe climate to deepen their bond as brothers.
- Some of the questions are designed to bring light to issues members are struggling with but don't feel comfortable speaking out about. The discussion afterwards would allow the comments to be anonymous.
- Brothers who normally remain silent when brain storming will not have that option, and often will discover an answer to one of the issues your chapter is struggling with.

Maze

			X	
				X
X	X	X		X
X			X	
	X			
	X			
X				

Definitions:

- Mistake: When any chapter member missteps into any maze square that is not part of the pattern though the maze and that has already been learned by other chapter members.
- False Move: When any chapter member fails to discover the next 'unknown' square in the pattern through the maze. There is no penalty for a false move, but the member making the false move must move to the back of the line.

Materials needed:

5 x 7 maze on tarp or drawn with chalk

Instructions:

There is a time limit of 15 minutes for this exercise. The rules are as follows:

- In front of you is a maze. The group's goal is to get through the maze without making any mistakes. The pathway out of the maze has already been determined and the facilitators are the only ones who know it.
- Here are the guidelines for your task:
 - You can only move from the box where you start to a box that shares a common border
 - The whole chapter must go through the maze one member at a time.
 - If anyone makes a mistake as they travel through the maze, the whole group must start over.
 - When a mistake or a false move (to be defined in a moment) occurs, the participant must exit the maze (back out of the maze) by the pattern that got them there.
 - There is to be *no communicating* about movement to chapter members once they are in the maze. It is okay to offer encouragement, but you cannot assist them in the task.
 - Once you have started in the maze you cannot go back.
 - No maps can be used or created
 - The chapter must establish a 'batting order' and stick to it to accomplish the task.

Processing Questions:

- How do you feel about this exercise? Was it challenging?
- How were you able to contribute if you were not the person *in* the maze?
- What skills did you use to help others through the maze?
- What was it like to have to restart the exercise?
- What role did concentration and active “watching” play in this exercise?

Application for Fraternities:

- In our chapter, sometimes we have to follow in the footsteps of those who came before us. In what way is this like a maze?
- Do we follow people blindly and do the same things they do? How might this relate to officer transition? How many people “file” things and just do what the persona before them did? Does this stifle our potential as a chapter?
- Often times in our chapter there are distinct roles that people must play. How does that role change when you are “doing” vs. supporting? Is either more important than the other? How well do we play the role of the encourager?
- How do we learn from the mistakes of those who have come before us? Do we pay attention or do we ignore the warning signals that experience shows us? (Think about risk management, social event policies, alcohol use)

Outcome:

- Make officer transitions easier, more efficient and more rewarding.
- Highlights the benefit of listening and talking to the leaders that have come before us.
- Learn to encourage the members who do not hold offices but have valuable input to give.

Yurt Circle

Instructions:

- You must have an even number of participants for this exercise. Individuals with shoulder and / or arm problems should not participate in this exercise for their own safety.
- The group forms a circle facing each other and counts off by two. Members grasp hands in the circle. Make sure that height and weight of participants is evenly distributed around the circle.
- Instruct the group to simultaneously lean in the opposite direction while supporting each other. This means that the 1’s lean forward and the 2’s lean backward. Lean gradually, not all at once. Do it again. Change directions. Do it with eyes closed. Do it silently.

Processing questions:

- Was anyone tentative at the beginning of the exercise?
- Was anyone nervous closing his eyes?
- How did it feel to be reliant on others for support?
- How important is the support you give to others?

Application for Fraternities:

- How is the exercise representative of how our chapter works? Our Greek community?
- Why are we hesitant to give trust to our brothers or other chapters?
- How can we develop more trust among our members and other Greeks on our campus?

Outcome:

- Learn to trust our brothers in hard situations.
- Create an environment where we can lean on our brothers for support when fraternity, school, friends, family and life in general hands us a challenge.

Team Beam

Materials needed:

Four 12" x 5" x 5" concrete blocks

Six foot long 2" x 4" beams of wood

Place the wooden beam across the concrete blocks so the wood is secure

Instructions:

- Split the membership into teams of 8-10. Split each team in half and ask each half to stand on the beam on opposite sides.
- Instruct the group that the two sides must change places, without knocking anyone off the beam and without anyone touching the ground. If anyone does "fall" off the beam or loses their balance and touches the ground, the entire group must start all over again.

Processing Questions (by team):

- How did this exercise go?
- Did you discover anything new about yourself and others? Do you like what you discovered? Why or why not?
- Did the team *act* as a team? Was there any competition between the two sides? Why / why not? Could the solution have been easier if the two sides communicated their plan before anyone acted?
- Is there value in competition?

Application for Fraternities:

- Has our chapter been hurt or helped by inter-Greek competition? How?
- How does working together benefit everyone?
- When our chapter splits on an opinion, what happens when we keep our feelings to ourselves and just within our group of close friends? What would happen if we worked together to find a solution that benefited everyone in the chapter?
- What would have happened if each group in the team was instructed to get to the other side without regard for the other half? Would the result have been as successful?
- What new insights can we think about regarding recruitment, relationships with the University and our relationship with other chapters on our campus?

Outcome:

- By working with the groups we think make obstacles for us we achieve the same (if not better) results and create relationships that are mutually beneficial.
- Competition can be healthy as long as you don't lose sight of the bigger picture.

Electric Fence

Materials needed: Rope

This activity should be done outside, preferably in a wooded area where there are plenty of trees.

Instructions:

- The rope should be tied between two trees about four feet high.
- Ask the participants to imagine that this is an electric fence with a force field from the top of the rope to the ground. The objective of this exercise is to get the entire group from one side of the rope over to the other side.
- The first person may not run and jump over the rope. He may not exit head first. The last person may not jump the fence, or otherwise exit under their power alone – encourage group work.
- When going over the rope, participants may *not* touch the rope, the connecting trees, nor break the plane under the rope. If members touch the rope or break the plane they “lose” the use of the body part that touched the rope. So, for example, if someone accidentally hits the rope with his arm, he has to hold that arm across his body and can not use it to help others over, or use it to help him get over the rope later.
- The facilitators *must* emphasize the importance of spotting and personal safety.
- Spotting rules:
 - If they begin to step on the backs of others remind them to not step directly on the spine or the neck of another participant. Instruct them to step on the shoulder and hips, if necessary.
 - Only one participant will be moved at a time.
 - The leader spots the first two participants over the fence; then the group members are fully responsible for spotting. The leader will also spot the last participant out.
 - The leader does not physically support the participants unless necessary in the instance of a fall.
 - Spot until the person in transport is completely over the fence and on the ground.
 - Be careful to spot the head and shoulder *all the time*.
 - Do not let someone be a “step” for too long.
 - Heads and shoulders must always be above the feet.

Discussion Questions:

- Was the group challenged by the exercise?
- Was communication strained? Why?
- How did the group accept your ideas?
- Did you lead or follow during this exercise? Why?
- What type of positive or negative reinforcement did you receive?
- What would you do differently in your next attempt?
- How would you work better as a team?

Application for Fraternities:

- How do we treat our elected leaders when they make a hard decision we don’t necessarily agree with?
- How do we respond to chapter members who want to offer their input? Is it always positive? When we respond negatively, how does it feel? Do you look forward to giving your ideas again?

Outcome

- Our goals are best accomplished as a team.
- When times get frustrating, our leaders should be able to rely on his brothers to pick him up.

Helium Hoop

Materials needed:

Hula Hoop

Instructions:

- For maximum impact, facilitators should play this up by never leaving their helium hoop unattended and by only laying it down if there is something else on top of it. The single reference of “this is my helium hoop” is all it takes to set the idea in people’s minds.
- Participants will only be able to touch the hoop with the tips of their index fingers and may only touch the hoop from underneath. Keep fingers straight and level, no curling. Move the whole hand to move up and down. They must maintain contact with the hoop at all times. If they lose contact, they must *immediately* re-establish contact. Demonstrate this by bumping the hoop up at appropriate times to plant the upwards movement in their minds.
- Group gets into a tight circle and brings their hands to waist height. Lay the helium hoop on their fingers and see what happens. Grab the hoop protectively as it gets almost out of the groups reach. Reset and try again.
- Once the group catches on, let them know the objective is to lower the hoop until everyone’s hands are touching the ground, while maintaining contact with the hoop.
- Remind the group of the requirement to maintain contact with the hoop constantly during the exercise.

Processing:

- How did the group deal with the challenge?
- What was the reaction of the group on the first try?
- What skills did it take to be successful as a group?
- What was it like being constantly reminded to keep your fingers on the hoop?

Application for Fraternities:

- Is there symbolism in this exercise that can be related to our communities?
- What would someone walking by the group during this exercise have said were our strengths and limitations?
- What role does accountability play within fraternities & sororities?

Outcome:

- We trap ourselves by holding on to our sacred cows – sometimes it’s best to let go of the idea that the hoop is helium.
- Everyone needs different kinds of support in the group – one way of pushing and encouraging someone doesn’t always work for every person in the fraternity.
- Even the brightest and best leaders can make mistakes. It’s important to always check your emotions and ego and make sure you are not contributing to problems by trying to solve them.

In the Bonds / Gavel Pass

Materials needed:

Ritual book or chapter gavel

Instructions:

- Gather membership in a circle. The person directly to the left or right of the EA begins the activity by sharing why he values his membership in the fraternity. When finished, he passes the ritual book to the next member.
- Whoever holds the book has the floor. No one can interrupt him.

Outcome:

- This activity can be used to air grievances, publicly praise your brothers one at a time, thank individuals and close chapter meetings.
- This activity creates an intimate and safe setting to say the things we normally won't say in day-to-day activities.
- This activity can also create a safe and trusting climate to make your brothers aware of issues you're struggling with and give you an opportunity to ask your brothers for help.

Reverse Gavel Pass

Materials needed:

Chapter gavel

Instructions:

- The traditional gavel pass (or In the Bonds) involves the passing of a gavel and each member speaking his mind. With a Reverse Gavel Pass, the person that holds the gavel does *not* speak.
- When a pledge brother gets the gavel, the rest of the pledge class and pledge educators tell him how much they value his membership in the fraternity or what they appreciate most about him.
- Allow each individual to share for 2-3 minutes. When all have spoken to the member holding the gavel he passes it to the next participant. Continue until all members have been "appreciated."

Outcome:

- This activity is especially useful for pledge classes at the end of their pledge period. Like the gavel pass, this is an intense sharing exercise that will require a great deal of time.
- The reverse gavel pass boosts self-esteem, further deepens our bonds of community and members have a renewed sense of empowerment and feeling of fraternity towards their brothers.

In the Bonds – Questions

Instructions:

- Separate the chapter into small groups of people (8-10 is the desired limits) including the widest variety of persons possible; the more diverse the group, the greater the dynamics. The groups should include a balance of pledges, big brothers, and other actives.
- Each group should have a copy of the discussion and processing questions found on the following pages.
- Each group should have a pre-selected group leader. The group leader should be an upperclassman, respected by the group and possessing as much fraternity leadership experience as possible.
- Sit in a circle. Make the circle tight but comfortable. The leader of the group should pick a question and pose it to the group. The group should answer individually going clockwise around the circle. Once the question is answered by all, the next person in the circle should pick a question, until all members of the circle have been allowed to ask one question. If time permits, the process can start again.
- Questions are not to be explained. Each person is to react to what he hears and the mood is to be kept serious at all times.
- Sessions should not exceed one hour.
- You do not need to use all of the questions prepared.
- Every question used is to be answered by every participant.
- A participant may “pass” if not ready to respond when his turn comes, but the leader should return to the person who passes after everyone else has responded with his answer.
- If someone wishes to repeat an answer that’s already been used, he should do so in his own words.
- At the end of the activity the group leader should process the discussion questions with the group.

Outcome:

- In the Bonds is effective towards the end of the pledging period or during any other intimate setting.
- It is a group interaction experience that creates a sense of community / fraternity by bringing brothers together in groups that would not come together under the normal flow of daily life. It aims to create an awareness of other brothers by the use of questions that reveal more than the superficial conversation that fills most of the casual meetings of brothers that are not close friends.

In the Bonds questions:

1. Who is the man most relevant in our times?
2. What is the best movie that you have ever seen?
3. When you think of *reality*, what comes to your mind first?
4. What is the thing you like most about a person
5. What is the most sacred thing you know?
6. What do you want to be doing ten years from now?
7. What event this semester stands out most in your mind?
8. What leisure time activity pleases you the most?
9. On what basis do you select your friends?
10. What is the most overwhelming thing you know – the thing that makes you feel the most humble?
11. What is the greatest value that guides your life?
12. If you could be any animal other than man... what animal would you choose to be?
13. What is the greatest crime one man can do towards another?
14. For what do you think you would lay down your life?
15. If you were making a CD and wanted to put the sound of violence on that CD, what sound would you use for violence?
16. What sound would you put on the CD for beauty?
17. What is your favorite sport?
18. What emotion is strongest in you?
19. Select a word that best describes your total life at this moment of time?
20. What historical development of Σ AE is most significant to you?
21. What single trait should qualify a man for initiation into Σ AE?
22. What one thing can you contribute to Sigma Alpha Epsilon?
23. What do you think people like about you the least?
24. What do you think people like about you the best?

25. What does ΣAE teach that is lacking in the college academic curriculum?
26. What person has most influenced your life?
27. What gives you the most security?
28. In one sentence, what does ΣAE mean to you?
29. When do you sense being alive the most?
30. What ideals do you and ΣAE have in common?
31. What one experience has been most significant to you in ΣAE?
32. When do you feel most lonely?
33. In school you have seen certain people all year and you have not spoken to them. Why?
34. What commitment did you make to ΣAE during your pledgeship?
35. What makes you a meaningful part of the fraternity?
36. What is the greatest thing you expect to receive from ΣAE as a member?
37. What is your greatest fear?
38. If you had to use another word for brotherhood, what would you use?
39. What one aspect of the local chapter would you change?
40. What do the songs of ΣAE symbolize to you and why do we sing them?
41. What are the qualities of the ideal fraternity man?
42. What one day in your life would you lie to live over?
43. Name a place where you have seen a spectacular display of nature?
44. What's the place where you spent the three happiest days of your life?
45. Who is your favorite singer / musical group?
46. What are three words you would most like said about you?
47. What skill do you wish you had?
48. How did you choose your career path?

49. What is one thing you do really well?
50. What would you do if you had one year left to live?
51. What is your greatest fear?
52. How would you like to be remembered?
53. For what contributions to the fraternity would you like to be remembered?
54. What makes you most frustrated about the fraternity?
55. If you could do anything over again, how would you do it differently?

Processing Questions:

1. Why did we do this?
2. What happened during this session of In the Bonds?
3. What things did you find out about other people?
4. Why don't we ask these kinds of questions in normal life?
5. What did you hope to accomplish during your Phi Alpha week?
6. Which person do you want to learn more about?
7. Which answer surprised you the most?
8. Which person did you learn the most about?
9. Which person did you think had the deepest insights?
10. Which person enjoys life the most?
11. Which person do you believe to be most like you?
12. Which person do you believe to be least like you?
13. What Σ AE affiliated individual do you admire most? Why?