



Pledge Retreat

A pledge retreat has many different goals. It is certainly a time for bonding and sharing of stories, but it can be much deeper and rewarding if the pledges are challenged to scratch a little deeper beneath the surface.

This pledge retreat was developed in parts by the University of Northern Iowa (Iowa Chi) and Sonoma State (California Alpha-Alpha), with some activities drawn from the Leadership School Staff curriculum and the North-American Interfraternity Conference.

Like all other materials, this is intended to be a foundation for your pledge retreat experience. Consider adapting it to meet the needs of your chapter.

Logistics

Set up a date and location for your pledge retreat well before the pledge semester starts. Masonic Halls, rooms at banks or hotels or somewhere on your campus are just some of the available locations that will meet the needs of the retreat. Do some homework and find a location that delivers all the room you need at the best price. With some luck and legwork, you should be able to find a location that's either free to use or only asks for a donation.

It is recommended that you hold the retreat at the beginning of the third week of the pledge program. This gives everyone enough time to feel comfortable with each other, and it will give you ample time to round up those final pledges you are recruiting and allow them to enter the program and not miss anything exceedingly substantial.

Chapters who use this format have good results with an overnight retreat on a Friday or Saturday night.

Pre-Retreat

So much happens at the pledge retreat that it becomes necessary to never look back or pause to gather materials left at the chapter house. It is very important that you begin planning the retreat early on. If you are going to serve dinner, pizzas always prove popular and you can find them cheap in most college towns if you look hard enough.

Consider purchasing some snack food (chips, etc) some soda, bottled water and anything else you think may be helpful. Free food gets everyone in a good mood. So, for this situation it's okay to go a little overboard and stock up.

Make sure pledges are aware from the day they pledge that pledge retreat is as close to mandatory as we'll get until Phi Alpha week. They need to bring a sleeping bag, a pillow and a change of clothes if they want, and whatever snack food they'd like. They also need their Phoenixes, handbooks, notebook or steno, and a pen.

Arrive early and set everything up. If possible, have everything separated into two separate rooms. A *meeting room* where you'll want to make a square of tables and chairs so everyone can see each other and an *activity room* for lack of a better term, where you'll want to remove as many objects as possible to create a large open space.

The active chapter and the chapter advisor are more than welcome to attend, but make it known that this night belongs to the pledges and active input should be kept to an absolute minimum.

Pledge Retreat

Below are several activities detailed for you to incorporate in your retreat. The activities have a natural ebb and flow, and the demonstrated order is effective, but can be modified as needed.

1. Housekeeping

Materials: notebooks, pens, poster board and markers

Location: meeting room

Time: 60 minutes

As an introduction to the retreat, make sure everyone is settled and prepared for the evening ahead. Let them know where the refrigerator is and where they can get their hands on the snacks and what time you'll be eating as a group. Locate all of the restrooms and give them permission to get and use the restroom right now – no asking later on, just go.

If you plan on going late into the night, make sure to spread snacks out over time. Turn cell phones to silent or vibrate, and try to make calls only during breaks (Breaks are not included in the schedule and you should allow breaks as you see fit).

Drinking should be prohibited, and chapters should use their best judgment on tobacco use.

Explain what you hope to accomplish during the retreat and agree on a set of rules to follow for the evening. Write them down on the poster board and have everyone sign it. Here is a list to get you started:

- Speak as the spirit moves you, but don't interrupt others
- No idea is a bad idea – shout them out as they come during goal setting, etc
- Never be ashamed to speak your mind – we're all brothers and the only way to deepen our bond is to be honest with each other
- What's said at retreat stays at retreat
- If you don't agree with something someone says, argue ideas – do not attack the person or the person's character

2. M&M's Activity

Materials: small bowl, M&M's

Location: meeting room

Time: 60 minutes

Objective: This activity should get people comfortable talking to one another and disclosing information about themselves to their fellow pledge brothers.

Pass around a bowl with six colors of M&M's and have everyone take two. *Do not eat the M&M's.* After everyone has two, read off the questions corresponding to the colors of the M&M's. Questions can

change at the discretion of the pledge educator. The pledge ed, assistant educator, chapter advisor, and any actives present can also participate.

Each person picks one of the two M&M's to talk about. If time permits you can go around a second time and use the second M&M.

Blue	Who is the person you admire the most & why?
Green	Why did you join ΣAE?
Red	What one experience has been most significant to you?
Yellow	If you could do high school over again, what would you change?
Brown	What one day in your life would you like to live over again?
Orange	Your choice

3. Goal-Setting

Materials: paper, pens

Location: meeting room

Time: 30 minutes

Objective: This activity should engage your men's minds and get them thinking creatively. Furthermore, working together to establish goals for the semester creates a shared experience and gives them ownership of the semester.

Topics to focus on:

- Pledge class GPA & how to attain it
- Pledge class paddle or gift to the active chapter
- Establish pledge social events and create big brother / little brother events

4. Your Time to Shine

Materials: none

Location: meeting room

Time: 10 minutes

Objective: Here you should impart wisdom and words of encouragement to the men you will be working with throughout the semester.

This is a small period where you can make a speech, talk from the heart or do whatever you feel comfortable with. You should talk about your personal expectations for the semester, offer encouragement and create a team where you are now a member not a figurehead. You are all together in the fraternity and you should be going to work with the pledges to accomplish their goals. They will respect you much more in the end if you walk *with* them instead of in front of them. Commit to them right now and move on to the next activity.

5. Deepest Darkest

Materials: large bowl, slips of paper, pens

Location: meeting room

Time: 20 minutes

Objective: This activity is designed to create a safe and trusting environment to deepen the bonds of brotherhood, reveal the diversity of the group and bring to light the many issues we struggle with that we now can lean on our brothers to help us with.

Deepest Darkest strengthens the bonds of brotherhood like few structured activities can. The point of Deepest Darkest isn't just to share the experiences that make us who we are, but more importantly it goes a long way towards destroying stereotypes and pre-judgments that the pledges have made on each other.

Ask the members to write something on the piece of paper that is unique to them – something others probably don't know about them. They are *not* to write their names on the papers – stress this point. Afterwards you'll collect them and later on in the night you'll read them aloud one by one, never attaching names to the comments. You'll then throw away the papers (you can wet them down first too to blur the ink). There will be further instructions later on.

Some of the statements will be comical, others very personal. Brothers will talk about their family, least proud moments, and many other heavy subjects. It's up to them what they write. Let them scatter about the room and write. Actives can also write. Collect them and serve dinner.

6. Deepest Darkest, part two

Materials: deepest darkest slips

Location: activity room

Time: 20 minutes

During dinner you should finish setting up the activity room. If you can, adjust the lights to create the proper atmosphere.

Bring everyone in the activity room and have them sit on the floor facing you and the assistant educator. Explain again that what is said here stays here. If anyone wants to "own" a statement, they are free to do so after all of them are read. They can say as little or as much as they want, and there is no pressure to own any of the statements. If someone wants to talk about a statement they should ask permission when it is just them in private and the owner has no obligation to say yes. Read them one by one and allow time for them to sink in. If the mood is awkward, feel free to say something to break the ice. The following statement is pretty encouraging to say – use it in your own words:

"Some of what you shared tonight was very personal. Thank you for sharing it. If anyone wants to deal with those issues, do so! Take care of yourselves however you need to. If that means talking with a good friend you trust, talking with me afterwards or going through counseling please do so. Counseling is free and confidential on our campus and you can talk to our Chapter Advisor privately to set it up. I thank you brothers from the bottom of my heart.

This activity goes a long way towards creating a climate of trust and brotherhood and the beginnings of deeper bonds of friendship.

7. The Member & the Fraternity Exercise

Materials: one full glass of water (the container must be glass, not plastic or paper)

Location: activity room

Time: 20 minutes

Objective: This exercise should expose the advantages and disadvantages of belonging to a group and working towards a larger purpose.

Begin by asking the question, "Do you have more freedom as an individual or as part of a group?" Explain that this is a debate question. Those who believe one has more freedom as an individual should stand on one side of the room. Those who believe one has more freedom as part of a group should stand on the other. Allow them to debate for a few minutes. Ask questions, if necessary, in order to stir

discussion. After a few minutes, stop the debate. Pick someone who argued passionately on behalf of “the individual.” Place the glass of water on the floor in front of him and ask him to try to drink it without using his hands. After he has struggled for a little while, pick up the glass and help him drink.

Use this exercise to show that though we may have to make individual sacrifices for the fraternity, by doing so we gain the support of its entire membership. Explain what is expected of an Σ AE. Go over the fraternity laws, your chapter by-laws, and The True Gentleman. Explain that they have lost the freedoms of irresponsibility and ungentlemanly conduct, but have gained the assistance of the largest fraternity in the world in all of their honorable endeavors. For example, if they want to stay active in your chapter then they’ve lost the freedom to make bad grades, but they’ve gained the assistance of the entire chapter if they want to do well. Provide a few examples of this nature. The main idea should be that the benefits of membership outweigh the sacrifices that cooperative living and the fraternal experience may require.

8. Body Pass

Materials: none

Location: activity room

Time: 30 minutes

Objective: This activity has everyone work together for a common goal. No one is left out of the process. The captive state of the group will give you a chance to facilitate quality brainstorming and say anything you need to say. Finally, there is a true sense of accomplishment at the end.

First and foremost, stress that everyone should be concerned with everyone else’s safety in this activity. Watch out for your brother and take care of yourself. Have everyone discard their shoes and lighten up their clothing if they’re wearing sweaters or sweatshirts (it can get hot). Line everyone up on the floor, backs to the floor, alternating directions so everyone’s heads are together. Get their shoulders as close together as possible and explain the rules of the body pass.

The goal is to have each person travel down the row with the members using only their hands to pass him. No talking is allowed unless instructed otherwise. The right side will send a person, then the left side, until all members are passed.

Get them started and occasionally mix things up by having them twirl the person, flip the person, send two at a time, stand up and pass him, etc. Be creative.

While you have them on the ground, you can do some excellent work to get the blood pumping. Ask questions while a person is midway through getting passed. “Matt, three weeks ago would you have guessed you’d be hoisted up by your brothers in some strange place on campus? How does it feel?” “Are you glad you joined?”

Be supportive of them. Thank them for joining your fraternity. Give them a break from time to time to talk to them about their role in the fraternity, in winning a zeal award, in building a chapter that will exist for years to come. Lead them in “Who are we? Σ AE! What are we? The best!” Do you thing.

Afterwards lead them in the Σ AE Yell.

Sit down for reflection time. Questions should include, “what was the point of this activity?” “How did it feel to be propped up by everyone?” “Did you trust each other? Why?”

9. Topoi activity

Materials: notebooks. Pens, large manila envelope

Location: anywhere

Time: 30 minutes

Objective: Pledges should reflect on their experience so far and find a sense of where they are heading.

This activity is a time for reflection. Have them compose a short essay about what they are feeling, what their expectations are, what they want to bring to the fraternity and what they hope to gain from it. Have them put their names on their essays and collect them in a manila envelope. These essays will be passed out during Phi Alpha week where they will look at what they wrote and compose their final topoi (see pledge guidebook). Let them take a break and go outside or wherever they are comfortable reflecting and writing.

10. Values and Ethics Discussion

Materials: none

Location: activity room

Time: 30 minutes

Objective: This discussion addresses some of the topics fraternity men should be concerned with.

Begin by explaining that achieving the True Gentleman is a *process*, that it's a lot more difficult than simply "having manners," and that we all have a lot of work to do if we hope to get anywhere close to reaching this goal. Simply ask them an open-ended question, such as, "How do you feel women should be treated?" After hearing their answers ask them, "How would a True Gentleman conduct himself?"

The following are just a few examples of the issues that you may wish to address during this discussion:

- Treatment of women
- Loyalty to an individual brother vs. loyalty to Sigma Alpha Epsilon
- Protecting a friend vs. telling the truth
- Drug use/excessive drinking
- Plagiarism/cheating on a test
- Taking responsibility vs. making excuses
- Any other issues that your chapter feels are important

11. Crossing the Line

Materials: none

Location: activity room

Time: 20 minutes

Objective: This activity further reveals the diverse nature of the group and shows that you are not alone in your journey.

Line up the group along the wall. When a question is read, they should walk over to the other side and face their brothers if the statement applies to them. Take a few moments and notice who is standing with you and who remains on the other side of the room.

Begin with this sample dialog:

"We live among diverse groups of people in our fraternity, the Greek community, in the wider university community and in the larger worlds. In this exercise, we will explore diversity... we might

even discover that this fairly homogenous-looking group we call Fraternity might be much more diverse than any of you may assume. This activity will involve labeling and personalizing diversity. It may prove difficult at times but in the end, it is our hope that this challenging activity will empower us to break down the stereotypes and assumptions we have and hold.

Remember – only answer the questions you feel comfortable with. There is no pressure to cross the room if you don't feel comfortable doing so. We will respect your decision.

Cross the line only if you feel comfortable identifying yourself this way.

Anyone who has blond hair
Anyone who has visited another country
Anyone who wears glasses or contacts
Anyone who has never flown
Anyone who is a person of color
Anyone who has been in love
Anyone who prefers cats to dogs
Anyone who is left handed
Anyone who is Catholic
Anyone who is Jewish
Anyone who is Protestant
Anyone who is Atheist
Anyone who would describe his family as blue collar or working class
Anyone who would describe his family as middle class
Anyone who would describe his family as upper class
Anyone who is the oldest in the family
Anyone who is the youngest in the family
Anyone who is an only child
Anyone who has ever felt lonely
Anyone who has ever suffered from low self-esteem
Anyone who would like to lose five or more pounds
Anyone who considers themselves a Democrat
Anyone who considers themselves a Republican
Anyone who could care less about politics
Anyone whose parents have divorced
Anyone who has had a parent, brother, or sister die
Anyone who is adopted
Anyone who has a family member who is gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender
Anyone who has experienced the effects of alcoholism in their family
Anyone who has had a friend or family member attempt or commit suicide
Anyone who would honestly feel comfortable confronting a fellow member who was telling racial or ethnic jokes
Anyone who would feel comfortable knowing a member of their fraternity was gay
Anyone who feels that it's okay to blackball a pledge because you believe he might be gay
Anyone who thought they could "spot" someone who is gay
Anyone who has ever been hazed
Anyone who has ever hazed someone
Anyone who has ever worn a t-shirt that is sexually demeaning to women
Anyone who has ever felt discriminated against
Anyone who believes they are tolerant of diversity

Anyone who believes they are accepting of diversity
Anyone who didn't cross the line for fear of what people might think
Anyone who crossed the line on one of these statements but would now change their answer

Allow them to ask questions as well. They should raise their hands and tell you the question they want to ask. If it is appropriate put it on the table for the group.

Questions for discussion:

- Was it relatively easy to 'cross the line' or were there times when it was challenging?
- What kind of feelings did you have as you participated?
- How did you feel when there were few of you on one side of the room?
- Did you find yourself making judgments of others?
- How did the movements of others influence you?
- What did you learn through this activity that we could use to make this a better, more welcoming environment for others in our chapter?
- What happens if your personal values and fraternity values differ? How do you resolve that conflict?

12. Goal-Setting, part two

Materials: none

Location: activity room

Time: varies

Bring them into a circle to re-evaluate their goals and add new ones as they are moved. This is also an excellent time for officer elections if it hasn't happened yet.

13. Parting Thoughts

Thank them for their energy and time. Congratulate them on their decision and offer words of encouragement for the semester.

"Remember what this night felt like. We've got a long road ahead of us. I thank you for being a part of the brotherhood of Sigma Alpha Epsilon."

Allow them to speak as the spirit moves them.

In the morning, the pledge educator and his assistant should wake up early and grab donuts and juice. It is also a nice time to evaluate the evening. Everyone should help clean the location. A donation of at least \$50 is recommended if an organization allowed you to use their property.