



*Our commitment to*

## **DIVERSITY, EQUITY, INCLUSION AND ACCESS**

Dear Sigma Kappas,

As we reach the end of 2020, we are pleased to provide you with another update on progress toward our commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion and access (DEIA). This has been a year of many challenges for our industry, our organization and our members. We look back on the year with gratitude for the opportunity it presented to place DEIA at the center of all we do. Our work in this area has only just begun, and we enter 2021 with a renewed sense of importance for the steady and unrelenting work needed to ensure that Sigma Kappa is an inclusive space for all members.

Below you will find updates to our recruitment policies, links to the DEIA Committee meet and greets, an introduction to our history and ritual inclusivity task forces and a summary of our accomplishments since our last update in October.



### **UPDATES**

#### **Recruitment Policy Updates**

On Nov. 16, you received an email sharing that national council voted to eliminate Sigma Kappa's legacy policy (section I.B of the *National Policy Handbook*). This change empowers our collegiate chapters to make their own membership selections and gives each potential new member (PNM) an equal opportunity to join Sigma Kappa. If you missed this update, you can read the full letter to the membership and view answers to FAQs [here](#).

In addition to the above change, national council also voted to eliminate a separate recruitment provision (section 1.A of the *National Policy Handbook*) that allows a recruitment supervisor to delay the bidding of a PNM if she deems it in the best interest of the chapter. This change ensures that collegiate chapters have the autonomy to offer Sigma Kappa membership to all potential members meeting the membership requirements. After researching, it was determined that this provision was added to our national policy in 1957, and based on the timing of the adoption, we believe it served an exclusionary purpose. Below, you will read more about the newly appointed history task force that will begin researching Sigma Kappa's history as it relates to past discrimination, including the closure of two collegiate chapters shortly before the delayed-bidding policy was adopted.

#### **DEIA Committee Meet and Greets**

In October, the DEIA committee hosted three meet & greet sessions to share information about themselves. These members with lived and professional experience have begun advising Sigma Kappa in all areas of our DEIA journey. Watch the videos on the [Sigma Kappa YouTube channel](#).

### **History Task Force**

As part of our strategic plan, we are committed to researching, documenting and acknowledging Sigma Kappa's history as it relates to past discriminatory behavior and practices, as well as our historical steps toward inclusion. National council has appointed a **History Task Force** to undertake this important work. Their efforts will begin in January and findings will be shared with the membership in late 2021.

Collectively, the members of this task force have an impressive number of undergraduate and post-graduate degrees in American history, significant expertise in conducting archival and oral history research, and professional communication and storytelling experience. Members of the task force have also studied and written about pre- and post-civil rights movement integration practices of sororities and the creation of culturally competent archives. Click here to see a list of the task force in the History Task Force accordion on the [website](#).

### **Ritual Inclusivity Task Force**

In 2019, a task force began studying the Sigma Kappa Ritual to identify non-inclusive language and practices, but the group's work plan was interrupted by the cancellation of the in-person convention experience. For 2021, national council has renewed the charge of this task force and appointed a revised **Ritual Inclusivity Task Force**.

This group will make specific recommendations to national council about what can be modified while preserving the items adopted by the Founders to make the Sigma Kappa Ritual inclusive and ensure it does not marginalize members. This work will begin in January with recommendations due to national council in June 2021 and outcomes will be introduced to the membership at convention 2022. Members of this task force span generations, identify (or do not identify) with religion in many different ways, and have vast historical knowledge of our Ritual and how it has been modified over time. [Click here](#) to see the members listed in the Ritual Inclusivity Task Force accordion on the website.

### **Sigma Kappa Foundation Scholarships**

The Foundation recently examined the scholarship review process to determine what our members need and break down barriers to get there. To gain insight into best practices related to scholarship programs, other sorority foundations, university colleagues and our own members were consulted. These conversations led to a significant overhaul of the scholarship application that provides a more complete picture of our applicants. Changes made to the process include:

- More open-ended questions allowing the member to share about their sorority and overall college experience and ways they have contributed that go beyond officer and committee leadership positions held.
- A more robust financial information section to determine sources of income and family/guardian support as well as extenuating circumstances that may inhibit their ability to obtain a degree.
- A new work experience section for the opportunity to describe their leadership experience and commitment to personal growth through a job or internship.
- An opportunity for applicants to share additional information about their life situation that will add to the depth of their application and help the evaluator understand more about them to properly evaluate their application.
- A more strategic evaluator recruitment process and evaluator training. The training will include the introduction of a new scoring rubric and the how-tos for evaluating as well as a bias training workshop.



## **WHAT WE'VE ACCOMPLISHED**

Since our last update, national council, Foundation board of trustees, National Housing Corporation board of directors and staff of all three entities have participated in monthly training with our DEIA consultant, Vicki Clark. These training sessions have covered implicit bias, privilege, subtle acts of exclusion (microaggressions) and change management. Staff have included DEIA expectations in job descriptions, started broadly communicating about staff vacancies and continue to participate in individual professional development related to DEIA. As we work to include new perspectives in our volunteer pool, we continue to post all vacant volunteer positions on the [website](#) and have created an interview process to fill volunteer positions.

The general creative team has produced a [non-fiction DEIA-related book list](#) and a [children's DEIA-related book list](#). The officer resources creative team created four resources including how to elect chapter officers without bias, one on working with members who cannot attend events, DEIA Tips for Collegiate Officers and recommendations on how to plan a successful event while considering DEIA. A DEIA chairwoman/advisors Facebook page was created as were resources for these officers and advisors. All resources will be added to The Learning Center in January.



## NEXT STEPS

A few immediate priorities for 2021 include a complete review of the Sigma Kappa *Bylaws*, the *National Policy Handbook* and the Promise for New Members program to analyze our policies through a lens of equity. The DEIA committee will work with committees responsible for recommending board members for the national council, the Foundation board of trustees, and the National Housing Corporation board of directors to identify opportunities for including the perspectives of members from underrepresented identities in Sigma Kappa leadership.

We are looking for members trained in **DEIA facilitation to join the Live with Heart Facilitator Team**. These energetic and dynamic women are trained to facilitate programs and interactive activities for our collegiate chapters to provide vibrant education and development opportunities for our members. Each facilitator volunteers her time, energy and wisdom to promote Sigma Kappa's values and purpose by facilitating personal and chapter growth experiences for collegiate chapters at least once per term. If you are trained in DEIA facilitation and are interested in joining the team, please complete [this application](#) by **Jan. 29, 2021**.

Change is not always easy, but it is essential for organizational growth and relevance. Since 1874, Sigma Kappa has continuously evolved to support the changing role of women in society, to embrace social movements for integration and inclusion, and to eradicate harmful practices like hazing. Change is often met with resistance, and it means that today's Sigma Kappa experience may look different than your own. But change is essential to ensure that Sigma Kappa can thrive and carry out its purpose for generations to come. Thank you for being on this journey with us and for remaining bravely open to self-reflection and change. Happy Holidays and Happy New Year!

In Sigma Kappa,  
**Ann O'Connell Adams**, *Theta*  
National President

**Jordan Duffie Bentlage**, *Theta Upsilon*  
Sorority Executive Director