

Alpha Chi Sigma Fraternity

Professional in the Chemical Sciences

Office of the

GRAND
COLLEGIATE ALCHEMIST



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January 4, 2021

It has been my pleasure to serve as the Grand Collegiate Alchemist this year. This report covers from January 2020 through December 2020. The year has certainly been eventful. It started out as normal with chapters making plans for spring rush, ritual, social and outreach activities. Then partway through the spring 2020 semester, the COVID-19 pandemic hit, throwing a wrench in all of those plans.

State of the Collegiate Branch

The Collegiate Branch is stronger than I might have predicted it would be now based on how this spring went. A major concern and source of much uncertainty within the Collegiate Branch specifically but also the Fraternity generally is the COVID-19 pandemic. In March 2020 many of our chapters had to suddenly change their plans when their universities moved to remote instruction and banned in-person gatherings of groups. Some of our chapters chose initially to cease operations until their universities move back to normal operations, though as the pandemic has continued those chapters have had to find ways to adapt. Other chapters jumped right into finding creative ways to conduct meetings, pledge education, and/or activities remotely. The timing of the move to remote instruction was such that many chapters were unable to initiate their pledges this spring.

Over the summer, it became apparent that the remote/online/distance education situations would remain at universities and our chapters would need to adapt. At Conclave, DCs (with the help of a few PRs) led COVID Discussion Groups. The chapters were grouped by characteristics/concerns so that the DCs (and PRs) could help facilitate discussions among the chapters in the group to help them make plans for how to adapt to the ever evolving COVID restrictions at their universities. These conversations have continued into the school year as well. They meet at a frequency determined by the group members, but the conversations are ongoing. The discussion groups act as another resource beyond the usual district boundaries.

Many of the chapters have come up with creative solutions to social distanced operations. With the help of the GMC, they were also able to conduct ritual virtually so they could initiate new members. Many initiated their spring 2020 pledge classes during the fall 2020 semester, some initiated new pledges class in the fall in addition to their spring pledges, and a few chapters decided they needed more time to adapt to the situation before bringing in new

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members. While our new member numbers are not what we would expect in a normal year, they are much better than we had feared earlier in the pandemic. During the 2020 calendar year, we initiated only 617 new members, which is about half the number we would expect based on recent years (see the Grand Recorder's Annual Report for additional details). While this certainly affects our operations, this number also shows how well our chapters came back in the fall and found ways to adapt operations to COVID conditions.

There is much uncertainty around what our universities will operate like in the next academic year and what our new normal may be. Our chapters continue to have a challenge in the coming months with the need to rebuild their numbers and learning how to operate under whatever constraints they may face at their universities in the coming semesters.

Expansion

Expansion of the Collegiate Branch has slowed significantly this year. The Oregon State University Colony of Sigma has become the Delta Rho Chapter, though they have not yet installed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. We will plan an installation for this chapter when we are able to safely do so. The High Point Collegiate Group of Gamma Iota is now a Colony and is continuing to slowly grow and build their presence on campus. They were able to initiate their spring 2020 pledge class this fall and are working to continue to grow into a chapter.

District Counselors

The District Counselors, as a group, have done an excellent job this year. Participation on monthly chats, chapter visits, overseeing their committees, District Conclaves, have demonstrated their commitment to the Fraternity and willingness to work with the Grand Collegiate Alchemist and the Supreme Council to improve the Fraternity. The District Counselors have been working hard this year to grow and work better with their district committees. All of the districts have committees with members who regularly interact chapters. One District Counselor (Michael DeVoss) asked to step down from the Piedmont District Counselor role in October for personal reasons. Charlie Cox was appointed to fill the position.

At the end of Conclave, new district lines were drawn resulting in 14 districts. An increased number of districts combined with some DCs wanting to step down at the end of the biennium resulted in many new DCs being appointed. Eight DCs were new appointees at the end of Conclave. Three of the seasoned DCs had been appointed the previous biennium. As a result, the entire DC group has encountered a steep learning curve this fall – with the pandemic on top of the new position, there has been much to learn quickly to fulfill the SC role. Sarah

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Pickett has stepped up to assist the GCA and the DC Chair (Spring – SEDC Matt Schnippert, Fall – NCDC Hannah Bowman) in working with the DCs and providing training and resources. One resource has been a new resource manual for the DCs. We have also put together information in a shared Google Drive and planned training. In addition to half-day trainings, the DCs have continued to participate on themed monthly chats organized by the DC Chair. I appreciate Sarah's work along with DC Chair Hannah Bowman in assisting me in supporting the DCs, both new and seasoned.

The District Counselors have done an excellent job maintaining contact with their chapters through the COVID-19 pandemic and will surely be an excellent resource in the coming months. They have held virtual district conclaves, officer meetings, group meetings, and chapter meetings. These may look very different from DC visits in the past, but the contact between the DC and the chapter is still there. I have been very pleased with how the DCs have adapted to the virtual visit and I am looking forward to seeing how they and their chapters continue to adapt to and overcome the challenges they are facing. I have enjoyed working with the District Counselors both new and seasoned this year and look forward to continuing to do so.

District Committees

The District Committees expanded this summer after a call for interested brothers went out on social media. In addition to helping identify potential DCs in new districts, we were able to add to our District Committees. These committees of interested professional brothers help our DCs support out chapters. We are always looking for more people willing to serve on these committees.

Health and Safety – 3P2E

This year we completed the initial rollout of the Health and Safety Philosophy and Policy to replace the Risk Management Policy. We also have asked chapters to add a Health and Safety Officer at all of the collegiate chapters; this was incorporated into the Constitution and Bylaws through Conclave legislation. Other related legislation included setting up a conduct committee at each chapter. Unfortunately, Alpha Beta has already had to use the conduct procedure, but they did a fine job with it. An Event Planning Guide is available on the website to help chapters think through and mitigate health and safety concerns when planning events. A parallel Chemical Demonstration/Science Outreach Planning Guide is also available on the website. The District Counselors have done a great job helping to distribute the information to their chapters and help the collegiate branch understand the new Health and Safety Philosophy and Policy while still learning it themselves. Additional training on the 3P2E process for SC, DC, PR, and OA is planned for early 2021.

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Chapter Advisor and Faculty Recruiting and Education

Many of our chapters have had difficulty in recruiting faculty members, sometimes being left in the position where a new person has to be initiated in order to replace a chapter advisor who desires to step down from the role. At times, some of our chapters have been left without a chapter advisor because of the lack of faculty brothers. We formed a committee to create recruitment material that chapters might be able to use to help recruit faculty members. We have created a survey that was sent to professional members, with a targeted email to chapter advisors specifically. We received over 200 responses to the survey, 38 of whom were faculty. The next steps are to use the data to create recruiting materials (e.g. brochures, flyers), provide information to the chapters on best practices for recruiting faculty, and then to add educational materials for chapter advisors related to their role in the chapter and the fraternity. Progress on this has slowed, as the focus of our efforts have shifted to supporting chapters during the pandemic.

Science Outreach Webinars

PR Justin Pratt and I have present workshops/webinars on best practices for science outreach. We offered this webinar in the spring and Oliver Penrose and I presented a similar presentation at Conclave. We plan to offer this webinar again and also add webinars on additional science outreach topics. In addition, PRs and other Professional Brothers have expressed interest in conducting webinars on topics of interest to our brothers. PR Pratt and I held a “Webinar About Hosting Webinars” for June 20, 2020 to kick off planning a few webinars on a variety of topics (besides science outreach) starting Fall 2020. Thus far we have had two additional webinars – one on collegiate budgeting and auditing and the other on transitioning to either academia or industry.

Safety Committee

The Safety Committee (chaired by PR Justin Pratt and Margaret Smallbrock) helped with creating the Chemical Outreach Planning Guide in the spring but has had a quiet fall 2020 semester. With most chapters functioning remotely, there has not been much need for the Safety Committee to consult on any activities. Going forward, they plan to examine how well the outreach planning guide is functioning and to adjust as needed.

House Chapter Advisory Committee

The House Chapter Advisory Committee (chaired by Michael Quan) continues to support our collegiate chapters with houses and their relations with their housing corporations.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee

The Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee was formed at Conclave. It is currently chaired by Helen Webster, GV, OA. While they are just starting to work, they have met a few

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times during the fall to discuss the goals of the group and to start discussions on how to best reach those goals. They also held a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Panel aimed at awareness in October.

Founders Day Celebration

I had the pleasure of working with the Grand Historian, D. Mitch Levings in planning a virtual Founders Day Celebration via Zoom on December 11, 2020. We had 131 people register and 96 attended. Attendees were treated to toasts by SC, OA, and the GH as well as others in attendance. They also heard stories about the Fraternity's history from the GH and saw interesting photos and information about the founders by John Becker. After the two-hour long formal program ended, many of the attendees lingered on Zoom continuing the conversation later into the night. The event was enjoyed by all and many have expressed a desire to hold a similar event next year as well.

Summary and Final Thoughts

It has been an eventful year to be the Grand Collegiate Alchemist. I look forward to seeing the projects that have been started this year continue, adding DC Resources, the continued implementation of the Health and Safety program, and continuing to interact with brothers at a variety of events. Some of my favorite events have been the monthly Ask Me (almost) Anything (AMaA) events where different SC members, the PR Chair, and the DC Chair took turns answering questions via a Facebook and/or Instagram Live for an hour or so. I have also enjoyed interacting with brothers via Supreme Council Social Hours on Zoom. Seeing the innovative ways that our brothers have responded to the challenges of the pandemic have been wonderful to see. I would love to hear from any brothers who have stories of the creative new programs, supports, projects, events, etc. that they and/or their chapter have engaged in in response to the pandemic. The ones I have heard about and seen have been wonderful additions to "normal" chapter activities and I hope many of them continue in the future. This is certainly a time of challenge but it is also a time of innovation.

We are facing much uncertainty with the COVID-19 pandemic and with it a variety of looming challenges. We will need to support our Collegiate brothers in recruiting and initiating new members as they themselves face uncertainty in their own lives. At the same time, our Professional Brothers are also facing challenges and uncertainty themselves. It has been wonderful to see the number of brothers who responded to a survey offering assistance to any brother in need. It was especially heartening every time we were able to help someone who reached out and asked for the help they needed. Regardless of whether we are in a position to help or we are in the position of needing help, we should always remember that we are bound with a tie of true and lasting friendship with brothers across the world. Our brothers

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are only a phone call, text, or email away, whether we need some help or just need someone to talk to.

It has been an honor to serve as the Grand Collegiate Alchemist this year and I look forward to continuing to serve my Fraternity and my brothers in this role throughout the coming year.

Yours in the Double Bond,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Merryn Cole".

Dr. Merryn Cole, Alpha Theta 2003
Grand Collegiate Alchemist
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