

Alpha Chi Sigma Fraternity

Professional in the Chemical Sciences

Office of the

GRAND
COLLEGIATE ALCHEMIST



Dr. Merryn Cole
3370 Saint Rose Parkway #736
Henderson, NV 89052
gca@alphachisigma.org
(812) 251-7437

June 1, 2020

It has been my pleasure to serve as the Grand Collegiate Alchemist this biennium. I took on the GCA role partway through 2019 after Howard Mayne stepped down for personal reasons. GMA Helen Webster asked if I would be willing and able to serve the rest of the term and appointed me GCA in April 2019. I was installed in July 2019 at the summer Supreme Council meeting. This report covers from April 2019 through June 1, 2020.

State of the Collegiate Branch

The Collegiate Branch is strong, but has experienced a slow-down in growth, both in terms of expansion and existing chapter membership. One thing that may have had an effect is the added Risk Management Surcharge on both the Pledge and Lifetime Membership Fees. This increase of \$100 total brought the total fees paid by pledges from \$220 to \$320. Combined with a decline in college enrollment nationally, several of our chapters have seen a decline in the number of pledges. Looking at pledge numbers over time (see Grand Recorder's Biennial Report) we have seen a decline in pledge numbers for the past few years starting prior to the addition of the surcharge. In response to concerns over costs for new members, we established a New Member Assistance Fund (NMAF) to aid potential new brothers. We have also encouraged chapters to look into local opportunities for fundraising or other assistance in paying the Pledge and Lifetime Membership Fees for their new members.

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 to cease operations until their universities move back to normal operations. Other chapters have found 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. Many are hoping to initiate those pledges in the fall along with additional new pledges. Our chapters also lost members to the Professional Branch through graduation this spring as usual. 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 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 fall.

Expansion

Expansion of the Collegiate Branch has slowed significantly this biennium. The York College of Pennsylvania Colony of Gamma Kappa was installed as Delta Pi Chapter in October. The

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Oregon State University Colony of Sigma has become the Delta Rho Chapter, though they have not yet been 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 continuing to slowly grow and build their presence on campus.

Contraction

This biennium Gamma Omicron Chapter at Lehigh University has been declared inactive at their request. The few brothers remaining on campus graduated, leaving no activity on campus. Delta Eta Chapter at University of New Orleans was also declared inactive due to lack of local interest. Delta Omicron at Florida A&M University has had some issues with paperwork and recruitment, and may soon follow. Their fate likely depends on whether their University is open in the Fall 2020 semester or will be continuing remote operations. The UC Santa Barbara Collegiate Group of Gamma Zeta and Westminster College Collegiate Group of Delta are no longer viable due to lack of interest in those locations. Winthrop University Colony of Rho was also dissolved at their own request.

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. With larger districts, there has been a strain on the District Counselors to visit and keep up with all of their chapters. Their district committees have stepped up and really helped with this. Four of the District Counselors (ACDC Jeff Moore, PCDC Emily Bloom, NDC Lauren Giarmo, and NEDC Howard McLean) have stepped down in 2019 for a variety of personal reasons. Stephanie Bates (ACDC), Charlie Cox (PCDC), Geoff Giarmo (NDC), and Kelly Allen (NEDC) have stepped in to fill these positions. Five other District Counselors have also expressed an interest in stepping down after Conclave: Geoff Giarmo (NDC), Emma-Rae Ranger (BSDC), Rachel Palasky (CDC), Oliver Penrose (GPDC), and Charlie Cox (PCDC). Having stronger district committees has helped in identifying who could step in to fill the role. We have also recently put out a call on Facebook and Instagram asking for professional brothers who are interested in becoming more involved. This has so far netted a return of 25 professional brothers who will be new to District Committees this summer. I enjoyed talking to each District Counselor one-on-one in May, to discuss their district, their chapters, and their plans for the future. I plan to continue these conversations in the future.

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District Counselors (Continued)

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. I am looking forward to seeing how they and their chapters are able to adapt to and overcome the challenges they are facing. I have enjoyed working with the District Counselors, new or seasoned, this biennium. One of the challenges with the number of new District Counselors we have seen this biennium was in training them. This has been a challenge in the past as well. I have asked Sarah Pickett to work on a resource manual for District Counselors. She has put together a mostly complete draft as of this writing and has asked some of the current District Counselors to provide feedback on it. I appreciate her using her past experience as a DC and DC Chair while undertaking this endeavor. With the number of District Counselors who have been recently appointed and more to come after Conclave, this document will get a thorough test next biennium. It will be ready for updates after feedback from the District Counselors to continue to make it a useful resource.

Health and Safety – 3P2E

This biennium has seen the writing and 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. An Event Planning Guide is available on the website to help chapters think through and mitigate health and safety concerns when planning events. The Supreme Council has also established a Health and Safety Education Plan to be sure we are regularly communicating the policy, philosophy, procedures, and related concerns to our brothers. We will also see legislation at Conclave related to the implementation of the Health and Safety Policy. This process has been a significant effort on the part of the entire Supreme Council in consultation with Holmes Murphy. 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.

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

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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.

Chemical Demonstration and Outreach Safety Committee

In response to the ban on chemical demonstrations after the last Conclave, a committee has been working on safety rules and procedures for improving the safety of chemical demonstrations and/or science outreach activities. The committee developed the Chemical Demonstration Planning Guide for the fraternity that provides a resource for brothers to think through key considerations for identifying and mitigating the risks in science outreach events. The guide mirrors the Event Planning Guide that chapters use in planning other events. The committee decided to use the American Chemical Society Safety Guidelines for Chemical Demonstrations as a source for specific guidelines to follow, though there will be ongoing discussion whether to continue using these guidelines or to develop our own.

Science Outreach Webinars

Prior to the COVID-19 cancelling the Pacific Coast District Conclave, I had made plans with PR Justin Pratt to present a workshop on best practices for science outreach. After discussing it, we decided to offer it as a webinar. We presented information on April 4 to five Collegiate brothers from across the country. Their feedback indicated that the webinar was useful, engaging, and helpful for improving their outreach efforts. The follow-up survey showed the participants would be interested in attending additional webinars and revealed additional topics they would like to see covered in future webinars. 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 have scheduled a “Webinar About Hosting Webinars” for June 20, 2020 with the goal of planning a few webinars on a variety of topics (besides science outreach) to start Fall 2020.

Summary and Final Thoughts

It has been an eventful biennium 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. 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

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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 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 biennium.

Yours in the Double Bond,

Merryn Cole

Dr. Merryn Cole, Alpha Theta 2003
Grand Collegiate Alchemist
Alpha Chi Sigma Fraternity