

# Alpha Chi Sigma Fraternity

Professional in the Chemical Sciences

Office of the  
  
**GRAND  
COLLEGIATE ALCHEMIST**



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December 31, 2021

It has been my pleasure to serve as the Grand Collegiate Alchemist (GCA) this year. This report covers my activities from January 2021 through December 2021. The year has been eventful with chapters continuing to respond to the ever-changing conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic. Chapters have had to learn to adapt to sometimes last-minute obstacles and be creative in how to conduct business, social, or ritual activities.

## State of the Collegiate Branch

The Collegiate Branch as a whole is doing better than I would have predicted when the pandemic first started to impact chapters in Spring 2020, but not all of the chapters are thriving. The COVID-19 pandemic has continued to cause much uncertainty and disruption throughout the 2021 calendar year both for collegiate chapters and the Fraternity as a whole. Many chapters have been able to work creatively to continue chapter operations even as universities restricted activities to only virtual. As restrictions have been lessened, chapters have done a wonderful job in pivoting between virtual and in-person activities as conditions (and university rules) allowed. Working with the Grand Master of Ceremonies (GMC) the chapters have been able to continue to initiate new members virtually and also slowly transition back to in-person ceremonies this fall.

In addition to the pandemic, some chapters continue to struggle with helping their pledges pay their Pledge and Lifetime Membership Fees. This is one of the biggest concerns I hear when visiting with chapters. At the national level, we continue to offer a New Member Assistance Fund (NMAF). This fund is limited, so we ask chapters to look for local solutions first. Many of our chapters have adjusted their local dues, fundraised, or found university programs to help pledges who cannot afford the fee. In 2021, we ran out of money in the NMAF and had to close applications mid-November.

There continues to be much uncertainty around what our universities will operate like in the future. At the time of this writing, the Omicron variant is surging across the country causing infections at rates not seen for many months. While vaccines are available, many states are seeing low vaccination rates. Universities who have recently said they would move back to fully (or mostly) face-to-face instruction in the spring have had to reconsider. Each day, more universities are announcing that they will start the spring semester with virtual/remote instruction. As such, our chapters will have to continue to be flexible and resilient, changing their plans to adapt to the changing local conditions.

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## Chapter Visits

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, the SC has spent much time trying to figure out how to best support our chapters. In addition to supporting the DCs, I made a pledge to contact all of the collegiate chapters and to visit at least  $\frac{2}{3}$  of them during the spring semester. During the spring 2020 semester, I visited 53 chapters virtually; some chapters were visited more than once. I continued this in the fall, adding an additional 7 chapter visits (two in-person, 5 virtually). The chapters I have yet to visit continue to be on my list of chapters I am concerned about. Gamma Delta, Gamma Eta, Delta Delta, and Delta Kappa have communicated with me some, but we have not yet been able to set up a virtual visit. I have neither visited or gotten a response from Delta Epsilon or Delta Iota. I will continue to attempt to visit these chapters in the spring 2022 semester while also reaching out to all chapters to offer another visit. My visits with the chapters have been varied in nature. I visited chapter meetings, taught lessons to pledges, played a variety of games (some chapters are very competitive with bingo or pictionary, I have learned), held Q&A sessions, sat on career or alumni panels, participated in cooking lessons, or whatever else the chapters requested I participate in. The scope of the visit was up to the chapter. I was pleasantly surprised to see Chapter Advisors at several of the chapters as well. It is always nice to see faculty involved with the chapters.

## Expansion

In February 2021 Tiffany Matyja was appointed the new Expansion Chair. While she continues to field occasional inquiries, we only have one active expansion effort - High Point University in North Carolina. High Point has been given permission to petition, though they have not yet submitted their final petition. Tiffany has been working on plans for more active expansion as well as data collection and analysis to aid our expansion efforts by better understanding why some expansion efforts seem to work better than others.

## Contraction

This year saw 5 chapters declared inactive at their request. Delta Gamma (Georgia Southern University) and Delta Pi (York University) were declared inactive in February. Delta Omicron (Florida A&M University) was next in February. In November, Delta Nu (Northern Illinois University) and Delta Rho (Oregon State University) were also declared inactive. In each of these chapters, membership numbers dwindled to the point there were simply not enough active brothers around anymore to recruit, educate, and initiate sufficient new members to bring the chapter back to life. In the case of Delta Rho, they were declared inactive prior to receiving their charter, as the pandemic prevented them from hosting an installation celebration.

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## District Counselors

The District Counselors (DC), 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 GCA and 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 the districts have committees with members who visit chapters. DCs have continued to be adaptable to ever-changing pandemic conditions as well. They have made virtual and in-person visits to their chapters this year. They have also continued to meet with the COVID Discussion Groups that were started at the 2020 Conclave. Chapters have enjoyed the social time as well as the support and ideas from other chapters around the country.

In August, OVDC Kelly Pachowicz asked to step down as she had moved out of district for a new job. After discussion, the Supreme Council (SC) decided the best way to address the vacancy was to redistrict. As such, her district was disbanded and the chapters were moved to new districts. Alpha Gamma moved to the North Central District, Gamma Eta moved to the Atlantic Central District, and Gamma Nu moved to the Great Lakes District. Similarly, the Bluegrass Professional Group moved to the North Central District and the Cincinnati Pro Group moved to the Great Lakes District.

Hannah Bowman (NCDC) has continued to serve the Fraternity well in the role of DC Chair. She has led focused monthly DC Chats, keeping detailed minutes. She has set up a Google Drive folder to share the agendas, minutes, and recordings of the chats. Hannah also has done a great job with communicating information to the DCs and being responsive to the SC. Sarah Pickett has also been a great resource for the GCA and DCs. She and Hannah have helped with DC training and support. Sarah continues to add to the resources in the Google Drive and attends chats and trainings regularly. I greatly appreciate Sarah's work as well as Hannah's work in assisting me in supporting both the newer and more experienced DCs this year.

The DCs have done an excellent job maintaining contact with their chapters throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and will surely continue to be excellent resources 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 of past biennia, but the contact between the DC and the chapter is still there. I have been very pleased with the ways in which the DCs have adapted and look 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 DCs this year and look forward to continuing to do so.

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## District Committees

District Committees continue to be a great support for DCs but also at times are difficult to fill. We continue to look for brothers interested in serving on district committees. I am hopeful that the Volunteer Coordinator will be helpful in this, as sometimes simply finding people in the right district is a challenge. DCs have struggled to use their committees this year, as they have been able to more easily visit their chapters on their own via video conferencing. As in-person visits have started to return, more DCs are asking their district committee members to make visits with them or on their behalf.

## Health and Safety – 3P2E

Chapters continue to work to change their local policies and procedures to meet the new Health and Safety Policy (3P2E) and to incorporate related changes from Conclave 2020 (e.g., required Health and Safety Officer, Conduct Committee) into their bylaws. DCs continue to hold annual Health and Safety training with each chapter and resources are in the Chrome and Blue twice per year. 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. In February we held a joint DC and Professional Representative (PR) meeting to discuss how PRs and DCs could better work together and also to conduct Health and Safety/3P2E training. The intent of the training for both groups together was twofold: first, the Health and Safety Policy applies to everyone, so our national officers need to be aware of it and second so that PRs could potentially support the DCs in conducting the annual training with collegiate chapters.

## Conduct Process

As chapters have begun to meet more in-person, the frequency of disagreements within chapters has increased. Some of these interpersonal conflicts have led to the use of the conduct process, as outlined in Bylaw II. Several chapters and/or their DCs have reached out asking for assistance in understanding and implementing the process. As a result, one of the DC Chats this fall was also focused on the conduct process. As we continue to gather feedback, proposed changes to it will be identified in the spring to be presented at Conclave. The intent is to clear up confusing or vague parts to make the process more equitable and easier to follow. Each time a chapter has used the conduct process, it has been a unique situation that we were not able to anticipate at the time the process was written to be included in the Bylaws. As of now, we have had a few cases go through the process providing more insight into what is working and what may need to be adjusted.

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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 must 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 are planning to use survey data to develop recruitment materials, 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. These materials will parallel other materials being developed to assist in recruiting in general.

## Science Outreach Webinars

PR Pratt and I continue to present workshops/webinars on best practices for science outreach. We have offered a basic webinar in the past and have plans for four additional webinars to make it a five-part series. We are also pursuing external funding to support both the implementation of these webinars and related research.

## Safety Committee

The Safety Committee (Chaired by PR Justin Pratt and Margaret Smallbrock) have not been asked to consult on any activities this year. Margaret has been working locally on contact plans in the case of emergency as well as chemical demonstration safety issues. Based on how these work out, they could be expanded nationally to other chapters.

## Diversity, Equity, Inclusion Committee

The Diversity, Enquiry, and Inclusion Committee was formed at the 2020 Conclave. It is currently chaired by Helen Webster, GV, OA, though PR Faith Yarberry is stepping in as co-chair in the spring. Helen, Faith, and I have sought out and completed some DEI training. We have also discussed future directions for the committee, with plans to start with DEI training for SC, DC, and PR in the spring. Plans are also being made for how to roll out training and other DEI activities to the Fraternity as a whole after beginning officer training. We have also created an anonymous reporting form for anyone who wishes to report or offer comments on DEI issues the Fraternity needs to address.

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## Housed Chapter Advisory Committee

The Housed Chapter Advisory Committee (Chaired by Michael Quan) continues to support our collegiate chapters with houses and their relations with their housing corporations. The biggest events this year have been that the Twin Cities Alumni Association decided to sell the house occupied by Beta Chapter. They have acquired a meeting and storage space for the chapter to use instead of the house. Alpha Corporation has also been dealing with the demolition of their houses and are pursuing fundraising and agreements to build a new multi-use building that will be partially occupied by the Alpha Chapter.

## Founders Day Celebration

I once again had the pleasure of working with Grand Historian D. Mitch Levings in planning a virtual Founders Day Celebration via Zoom on December 11, 2021. Attendees were treated to toasts by SC, OA, and the GH as well as remarks and toasts by others in attendance. They also heard stories about the Fraternity's history from the GH. Others in attendance also shared stories and photos. After the formal program ended, many brothers lingered and continued the conversation later into the night. The event was enjoyed by all and many have expressed a desire for the event to continue to be held in the future.

## Summary and Final Thoughts

It has once again 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 interactions with collegiate chapters, seeing the unique things they do. Chapters each have their own personalities and customs, while we all are bonded by the objects and shared ritual.

As we continue to deal with the pandemic, we need to continue to be adaptive to changing conditions and support each other. While we may not be able to do everything we want or to do them in the ways we want, we can still meet, support each other as brothers, and push our Fraternity forward. I challenge everyone to think about what is important to them, what is meaningful to the Fraternity, and choose carefully what the new "normal" should look like. Do not continue to do things as we have always done them without a good reason. While we cannot change the ritual or Health and Safety Policy or other procedures without the consent of the SC, National Office, and/or Grand Chapter, we should all think carefully about what we do locally. Rather than dwell on the ways of the past and go back to them, we should consider what we want our chapters to look like in the future and strive toward that ideal. Similarly, we should consider

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what we want the Fraternity to look and act like in the future, and bring those ideas to Conclave to push the Fraternity forward rather than going back to the ways we used to do things. The old ways are familiar and often comfortable, but new ways are sometimes needed in order to grow and progress.

It has been an honor to serve as the Grand Collegiate Alchemist this year, and I look forward to continuing to serve in 2022.

Yours in the Double Bond,

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

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