

**DEFERRED RUSH-
WHAT IS IT AND WHAT EFFECT
WOULD IT HAVE ON RUSHEES AT
THE UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE AND
ON THE UNIVERSITY ITSELF**

Stephanie Rovere
University Honors Program
Cari Heigle
Faculty Mentor
December 1995



DEFERRED RUSH- WHAT IS IT AND WHAT EFFECT WOULD IT HAVE ON RUSHEES AT THE UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE AND ON THE UNIVERSITY ITSELF

Deferred Rush is a term used to describe a Formal Rush period occurring any time other than the beginning of the fall semester. Formal Rush is the period of time when greek organizations take in new members. The Deferred Rush period may be during the semester, after school begins, or later in the school year at the start of the winter or spring semester. During the time when a school is not involved in a Formal Rush, chapters may conduct individual informal rushes or engage in continuous open bidding. However, chapters are only allowed to participate in such activities if they are below chapter total. Chapter total is a minimum number determined by Panhellenic. Any chapter falling below this number may pledge girls at any time in order to reach and maintain chapter total. This is a practice which is used at 90% of colleges and Universities throughout the nation, according to the Rush 2000 Survey. For example, at the University of Tennessee chapter total is 85. If a chapter has less than 85 girls then they are allowed to seek out new pledges. The new pledges/new members may be chosen through informal rush parties, similar to those of Formal Rush, or by the simple extension of a bid (continuous open bidding), as mentioned before. In a system using a Deferred Rush schedule, informal rush and continuous open bidding would occur in the fall. The only women who are eligible to pledge at this time, the fall, are those who have already attended college for at least one

year. Thus, this schedule excludes the freshman who must wait for Formal Rush.

The University of Tennessee is not currently on a Deferred Rush schedule, however the possibility of switching to Deferred Rush is being considered. Tennessee's Deferred Rush would most likely occur in January, at the beginning of the spring semester. Formal Rush currently overlaps the first week of classes in August. Although there are southern universities on a Deferred Rush schedule, none of these are Peer Institutions of the University. Peer Institutions are schools comparable in size, funding, student demographics, and academic programs. Some examples of peer institutions are the University of Florida, the University of Georgia, the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill, and the University of South Carolina. All of these schools currently conduct Formal Rush at the beginning of the fall semester.

On first glance it may not seem to matter when Formal Rush occurs, in the fall or in the spring. However, the timing of Formal Rush is important and there are certain influential factors which hold true at any school. Strong arguments exist for both sides of the debate concerning Deferred Rush. At each school there are also influential factors which will make one side of the argument stronger than the other. At the University of Tennessee Knoxville Panhellenic feels that the benefits of holding Formal Rush in the fall outweigh those of having a Deferred Rush. For the purposes of this argument Deferred Rush at the University of Tennessee Knoxville will, in this work, be understood to take place at the start of the spring semester in January, unless otherwise stated.

Those influential factors referred to above, which are true at any school, deal with the situation created in the first semester of a Deferred Rush system before Formal Rush occurs. By pushing Formal Rush to the second semester it might appear that the pressure of Rush is being

removed from incoming freshman women. This is not the case. Freshman women will become rushees from the time they step onto campus. Each chapter will be eyeing and judging these new additions to campus and predetermining who they prefer. The women must therefore be aware of every action and statement that they make. This creates a distrustful atmosphere between the chapters and a sense of competition. This also creates a wary attitude between the freshman women and the greek women. Not only could Deferred Rush cause these problems, but also problems between Panhellenic and the chapters. Panhellenic will be forced to chase rumors and enforce rules which are violated by inflicting some punishment. This makes Panhellenic appear to be acting as the police and even the bad guy. This of course is only if chapters are actually caught "dirty rushing." "Dirty rushing" means breaking the rush rules set by Panhellenic. The difficulty is it is very hard to prove that a freshman woman is being dirty rushed. Therefore Deferred Rush is "effectively unenforceable." The purpose of Panhellenic is to promote harmony between the chapters. Deferred Rush could destroy this tenuous harmony. This problem is universal throughout schools with Greek systems and must be dealt with carefully.

The general argument against Deferred Rush is backed up by more specific arguments based on each schools situation. Panhellenic at the University of Tennessee Knoxville believes that the additional, school-specific arguments for continuing to conduct Formal Rush in the fall surpass those arguments meant to support a Deferred Rush. The rest of this paper will focus on those arguments and their specific influence at the University of Tennessee Knoxville. Because the ultimate goal of Formal Rush is not simply the act of rush itself, but the goal of adding new members to each chapter, the experience of membership must be considered as well as the actual experience of rush. Therefore, this paper will look at arguments and examine the effects on

certain areas both during Formal Rush week and afterwards as women become involved in their new chapter. The areas of concern which this paper covers will include the effect on the women's personal lives, their leadership and involvement opportunities, and their academics.

Personal Life

The Formal Rush process and subsequent pledging has a definite effect on a rushing woman's personal life. The effect is especially noticeable on first time freshman. A common argument for Deferred Rush is the argument that students come from very homogenous backgrounds and when they come to college and join a greek organization they are locking themselves into another homogenous group. Deferred Rush advocates claim that by doing this the student limits her exposure to diversity and to experiences which help to form the skills necessary to adjust and succeed in the work force and socially in the world they will enter as adults. At the University of Tennessee Knoxville the percentage of non-Caucasian, undergraduate students is only 11.3% for the 1995-96 school year. Of the 460 undergraduate African-American women, 12% of them are involved in NPHC sororities. NPHC sororities are historically all-black sororities. Although the percentage of non-Caucasian, undergraduate students in NPC sororities is only around 1%, the NPC and NPHC sororities interact on a regular basis. The groups meet together for Panhellenic meetings, Presidents and Scholarship Roundtables, and sorority information days. The chapters are also intermingled during Panhellenic service projects such as the Halloween and Christmas parties for the Boys and Girls Club and the On-Target Program. Among other things, Panhellenic also holds an ice cream social for all the groups and a scholarship banquet to honor any member with a 3.7 GPA or higher. Groups are also paired

randomly for Greek Week activities. Not only does the Panhellenic system encourage a diverse experience for its women within the system, but also it encourages the women to learn all they can by offering numerous diverse speakers and discussion sessions. Panhellenic also makes each chapter aware of campus speakers or programs that would enhance the women's college experience. Individual chapters also seek to push their members out of the chapter environment and into the University by requiring other involvement which will be discussed later. The Panhellenic experience at the University of Tennessee is not sheltered or simply self-centered.

Advocates for Deferred Rush who believe that freshmen should be allowed to encounter diversity and experience an unusual setting during their first semester must consider another aspect of the freshman experience. "In college, the support systems that freshmen have built for themselves from previous environments may be gone, or no longer supportive.(Gardner, 69)" This may leave freshman feeling confused and disconnected from the world in which they are living. "While there are many strategies available to help freshmen with the transition to college, including orientation, advising, counseling, and mentoring programs, too many freshmen find themselves in a sink-or-swim situation(69)." Freshman often need an anchor in the storm of newness. This is something that the University, especially one the size of the University of Tennessee, cannot always provide. Without something to hold a student they will often be lost to the university. This can be seen through the University's retention rates. In 1994-95 20% of first time freshman did not return. This was out of a class of 2912. University statistics also show that only about 55% of students go on to graduate within six years. The retention rates for Panhellenic organizations are higher than those of the University. For example, the average rate of

University of Tennessee Diversity Statistics

<u>Race</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
Caucasian	89.7%
African-American	5%
Asian	3.9%
Hispanic	1%
Other	.4%

women in Zeta Tau Alpha sorority who pledge as freshman and go on to graduate, is 77%.

These differences are found because the Formal Rush process and the greek organization can offer students something to anchor them or on which to build a foundation.

At the beginning of Formal Rush each rushee is placed in a group of 10-14 women called a Rho Chi group. An older, disaffiliated greek woman, known as a Rho Chi or Rush Counselor is the leader of the group. The Rho Chi guides the women through the entire rushing process. She is there to answer any questions, discuss unusual situations, and provide support. The Rho Chi has disaffiliated from her sorority so that she may be unbiased and fair to each girl and each chapter. Individual Rho Chi groups also spend time together outside of the rush setting. This may be by going to the Chancellor's picnic, out to dinner, or to a movie. By the end of rush the group has formed a bond which often extends throughout the college years. This element used during Formal Rush gives the freshman a sense of connectedness and shared understanding of new experiences. Once the woman pledges, a whole new support system is available to her. As was stated earlier this is very important for freshman. By having Formal Rush in the fall greek organizations can provide this needed support.

Upon entering a sorority, every woman is given a big sister. This is a woman who is generally older than the pledge or has been in the chapter for at least one year. The big sister is meant to guide the new member through not only fraternity life, but also the entire college experience. She will be a friend, a tutor, a counselor, and many other things. The freshman is no longer left to fend for herself. According to Gardner and Upcraft "establishing close friends, especially during the first month of enrollment" contributes to freshman success, and "sorority life offers the kind of close friendships that are not easily found in other organizations(Harrison,

2).” Since many students are from out of town sorority life offers them a new family away from home. This is especially important for those first time freshman who have never lived outside of their house or away from their families for any extended period of time. It was once written in a National Institute of Education’s report that “many students enter college with only vague notions of what undergraduate education is all about, where it is supposed to lead, and what their institutions expect of them.” Freshman need to be reached out to and individually encouraged to get involved in programs and services. This is what sororities do for freshman women who pledge, through big sisters and chapter programming. Moving Formal Rush to the spring would eliminate this influence and possibly cost the student an education and the university a student.

Academics

Of course the most important consideration for freshman, or any University student, is academics. Supporters of Deferred Rush claim that a semester free from the influences of a greek organization would allow freshman to “get their feet on the ground” academically. They are claiming that sororities cause poor academic performance in freshman their first semester. This is simply not true at the University of Tennessee. One of the stated objective’s of greek organizations at Wake Forest University is also a goal of greek organizations at the University of Tennessee. This goal is “to provide an atmosphere in which intellectual curiosity is valued and to provide activities that complement rather than inhibit scholarship and service(Report, 22).” This is seen by the fact that University statistics show that the All-Sorority Average GPA is consistently higher than the All-Women’s Average.

	All-Sorority Average	All-Women's Average
Spring 1995	2.98	2.95
Fall 1994	2.93	2.95
Spring 1994	3.01	2.95
Fall 1993	3.06	2.88

The All Pledge Average is also consistently higher than the All Freshman Women Average.

Therefore the academic argument is weak at the University of Tennessee.

Deferring Rush to January would deprive freshman of much needed scholarship programs provided by the chapters. Each woman is academically encouraged not only by her big sister, but also by her Pledge Educator and the chapter Scholarship Chairman. For the majority of the chapters receiving grades below a certain level carries the penalty of social probation and often a loss of voting privileges. Since Scholarship is important at the National level as well as the University level, chapters are encouraged and often required to maintain a certain chapter wide grade point average. Chapters therefore have extensive scholarship programs. These programs provide things which a University this large cannot provide for every student. Every chapter has specified study hours. These study hours may be based on cumulative GPAs or simply applied broadly to all members. Study hours in some chapters may be performed individually and then reported to the Scholarship Chair. In other chapters there are designated study hours which are monitored; and in at least one chapter, Alpha Gamma Delta, there are required, proctored study hours. Sororities do not simply require study hours and then provide nothing else scholarship-wise. There are programs such as study buddies where people are paired to study together and to encourage one another. There are also incentive programs with prizes for the most study hours,

the best GPA, and the most improved GPA. Tutoring also plays a large role in greek organizations. It is easy to match older members who have already taken classes with younger members currently taking the classes if they need help. Many chapters also keep professor files, class files, and test files. These provide members with information on classes and professors and even sample tests from which to study. Panhellenic also acts as a motivator by rewarding women with above a 3.7 GPA with a banquet held in their honor.

Not only are there specific scholarship programs provided by each chapter, but also speakers or programs concerning time management, study skills, stress management and other related topics. "To experience early successes, freshmen must learn to understand and meet the expectations in their new environment, particularly with study skills, independent living, and time management(Gardner, 72)." Greek organizations try to provide their members with the information and opportunities necessary to make them successful. There are simply not enough University counselors and advisors to reach every student and not enough hours in the day for those counselors and advisors available. Therefore the weight of learning these skills is left up to the student. A sorority thus relieves the student of this burden by incorporating information on such skills into their programming. Ultimately the sorority is doing the job of the University. The University of Tennessee would be harming itself by harming this pathway of academic guidance. That is exactly what it would be doing by switching to Deferred Rush.

Deferred Rush would have other academic effects as well. Formal Rush currently falls immediately before school starts. It only overlaps with two days of classes, those being Thursday and Friday. At the beginning of the school year no one is pressed with classwork or stressed over grades so the timing of Formal Rush is good. If Formal Rush was delayed into the fall this would

not be the case. Rushes as well as chapter members would be in the middle of classwork, papers, and tests. Their academic achievement could be greatly harmed by the added stress of Formal Rush in the middle of the semester. Deferring rush to January might not cause any direct academic stress, but it would cause personal stress and therefore indirectly cause academic stress. Every chapter is involved in Rush workshops or retreats the week before Formal Rush begins, and as Catherine Harrison, Panhellenic President said, "successful rush retreats are essential to a successful rush." This would mean cutting students' Christmas breaks short to return to school for the retreat and taking away from their time of rest and recovery from the fall semester. The early return would also cut into family time for many students who live out of town and cannot return home often. It would be much more difficult to plan an effective rush retreat in January than in August, due to the hectic holiday schedule. The University would also be put to the expense of opening dorms and cafeterias earlier and providing mail services.

As one can see from chapter programming and actual University of Tennessee statistics, Formal Rush in the fall does not hinder freshman academically. In fact, acknowledging these statistics, Bill Barnes, Assistant of the Vice President/Student Services at Georgia Institute of Technology, claims that "not allowing first term pledging may in fact hurt academic performance." Sororities shoulder the University's responsibilities regarding scholarship when these responsibilities become too burdensome because of the large number of students. Sororities have a vested interest in the academic performance of their members. Poor performance in the first term can make the first year experience "more negative/traumatic, and possibly contribute to a student's doubt about having made a good choice of institutions(Barnes, 8)." They have no desire for their members to perform poorly and therefore do all they can to assist them. This

assistance and programming by no means ends after the first year. The greek organization's interest in its members' academic performance is continual throughout the college years. The academic benefits of sorority life far outweigh the academic costs associated with greek life. The influence of sororities in the fall semester should not be removed from the freshman experience.

Campus Involvement & Leadership

The effects of deferred rush and the greek system on women's personal lives and their academics are evident. Another aspect of women's lives that greek life effects is their involvement and leadership role on campus. "There is significant evidence that active participation in the extracurricular life of a campus can enhance retention and personal development(Gardner, 150)." A sorority gives a woman a place to feel comfortable and be herself, but it also challenges her. Greek life opens up many new possibilities and introduces her to people involved in many different types of activities. Each woman is encouraged to get involved and take on responsibilities without and within the sorority.

Within every greek organization there are a multitude of offices and chairmanships. From the time that a woman enters her pledgeship she is being trained and molded to assume one of these positions. She is taught by example and programming. The women are also promoted and prodded by their friends to take on responsibilities they might not have otherwise. This is necessary because "today's typical freshmen do not enter college with high levels of self-motivation(77)." On the average there are 20 elected or appointed officers per group and around 5 elected special chairmanships per year. These numbers do not include co-chairs and assistant chairs or rush chairmen. One can see the necessity and opportunity for women to

become leaders in their chapters.

Panhellenic Council also supports and promotes the leadership abilities of its women. Every year Panhellenic, IntraFraternity Council, the men's equivalent to Panhellenic, and the Order of Omega host an Emerging Leaders Retreat. Two freshman from every chapter are chosen to attend this retreat where they are given new ideas and generally trained to move into leadership positions. Panhellenic and individual chapters also sponsor motivational speakers who speak on leadership and interpersonal skills on a regular basis. Greek organizations are once again accepting the responsibilities of the University. Next semester will be the first time that the University has offered a class specifically focusing on leadership development. The University does hold a single weekend Student Leaders Retreat annually, however they leave the rest of the grooming and training up to other organizations, like the sorority.

This trend towards leadership does not end within the chapter. On a campus with over 200 student organizations, not including Panhellenic and IntraFraternity Council organizations, around 50% of the officers or directors in these organizations are greek. Do not forget that this is a campus where only 15% of the students are greek. This number is quite remarkable and evidence of the positive influence of the greek organization. The majority of the sororities require each of their members to be involved in one to two activities outside of the chapter. These women take their experience of accepting responsibility into their other activities and therefore seek out leadership roles. Even if greek women do not choose to seek offices in their campus activities they are still seen to be actively involved and contributing members of these organizations.

If the University moved to a Deferred Rush the development of new leaders would be

hindered. The entire first semester would be lost. The nurturing and training offered by the greek organization to new freshman would be missing from their initial experience. With many organizations, including sororities, electing officers based on a calendar year this could be a problem. Also a freshman is more likely to get involved early and stay involved, rather than get involved later during her college years. If a freshman waits to get involved and becomes accustomed to college life without activities she is less likely to seek out campus groups in which to participate. This possibility of freshman not getting involved is legitimate, especially if they lack encouragement and backing they may need. This vital role played by the sorority would be impeded by a Deferred Rush.

Conclusion

The greek organization seeks to create well-rounded individuals. The organization has the ability to offer more diverse activities and opportunities than any other single organization on campus. Each chapter is interested in and involved with academics, philanthropy/service, friendships, and other social activities. The greek woman learns to be interested and successful in academics, leadership, community service, and meaningful friendships. These interests are not considered separately, but taught to be achieved as a whole.

The involvement of greek organizations is not seen exclusively within each organization, but also without. Groups participate in campus-wide cleanups, adopt-a-spot programs, and All Campus Events such as Homecoming, All-Sing, Carnicus, and the Volunteer Challenge. Chapters co-sponsor, with other University organizations, speakers and panels provided for the entire student body. Greek organizations are also donate their time and money to causes such as Campus Chest, AIDS Awareness, and Habitat for Humanity. Greek organizations also give

money to the University in the form of Housing. The two sorority dorms, Massey and Greve, are the only upper classmen dorms which are consistently full. Twelve percent or 772 beds belonging to University housing are owned by sororities. This figure does not include greek freshman women who live in freshman housing. This would add another 7.5% to the percentage of housing owned by sororities, making the percentage of housing owned by greek women, 19.5%. This is greater than the percentage of undergraduate greek women, which is 15%. The effects on the University are obvious.

It is apparent that the benefits of sorority life effect not only those directly involved, but also the University at large. Greek organizations are even found accepting the responsibilities of the University in some cases, for example, in counseling, scholarship programs, and leadership development. The Formal Fall Rush currently in effect at the University of Tennessee allows incoming freshmen to reap these benefits immediately. The effects of changing to a Deferred Rush schedule would be detrimental to all involved. The decision to change must take into consideration all aspects of Formal Rush and greek life, not simply focus on one particular aspect. The positive aspects of greek life and its effect on freshman at the University of Tennessee appear to support the continuation of a Formal Fall Rush.

References

- Barnes, Bill. "Deferred Rush" Booklet. Georgia Institute of Technology.
- Gardner, John L. & Upcraft, M. Lee. The Freshman Year Experience. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1989.
- Harrison, Catherine. "Responses to First Year Experience Questionnaire". University of Tennessee Knoxville: 1995.
- "Report of the Greek Life Study Committee" Wake Forest University: September 1993.
- "Rush 2000 Survey Statistics". National Panhellenic Council: 1995.
- Statistics- Other statistics were obtained from either the offices of Undergraduate Admissions, Housing, and Institutional Research or through surveys.