



## Beyond “Sound Mind, Sound Body”

By Bob Lanham

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When Socrates was asked about the “virtuous man,” he said, “At the highest level, the virtuous man is one who consistently strives to do right of his own accord. The virtuous man at the secondary level is one who is motivated toward virtue by his company with others who are striving for virtue. Pity the man who neglects both of these.”

The founding brothers of Sigma Phi Epsilon recognized the need to pursue *the ideals of virtue and balance* in the company of one another. These same brothers saw the benefit of young men joining together with like-minded individuals, enhancing their chances of achieving the benefits of a balanced, value-based life.

Our world is complicated by many crosscurrents that involve moral and ethical questions brought on by rapid social and technological change, shifting markets and economic trends, the clash of cultures and ideas—all enmeshed in increasing global complexity. On our campuses and in our communities, many obstacles distract us from our quest for excellence. Our own resolve falters without a sustained and disciplined approach. Only through discipline and the mutual encouragement of our brothers can we develop the *habits of mind* that lead to actions, ideas, and relationships that will *raise* the human condition rather than lower it. Our Founders recognized this.

Sigma Phi Epsilon was created to be different. The original charter (from October, 1902) conveyed the following vision for this Fraternity: “*Its purpose shall be to intensify and perpetrate friendship and promote happiness among its members, to encourage literature and education, and to create such sentiments, mold such opinions, and perform such deeds as shall conduce to the building of a noble and pure manhood.*” The words may seem a bit dated, but the ideals here are clear ... and timeless. They reflect the wisdom of the ages. Our Founders’ vision of brotherhood was based on diligence, balance, time-tested moral values, and a brotherly love for their fellow man that provided *enlightenment for the mind, strength for the body, and relationships that sustained the spirit.*

The Founders realized that the formation of a vibrant and intellectually rigorous environment could result in significant, life-changing growth for those who willingly participated. The really good news is that their vision is ours! Today’s Sigma Phi Epsilon strives to create an enriching and supportive environment in which we can help each other grow into balanced leaders capable of delivering a positive impact in the relatively short time we have in this world.

### Enlightenment for the Mind

Clearly, because this Fraternity exists on college campuses, there exists an implicit assumption that its members are interested in the pursuit of knowledge. As our Founders reminded us, “Knowledge is not absolute; its pursuit is unending.” This means that knowledge comes as a result of a lifelong process to gain ever-increasing knowledge—it involves building the *habits of mind* to pursue enlightenment. George Bernard Shaw aptly put it this way: “What we want to see is the man in pursuit of knowledge, not knowledge in pursuit of the man.”

Our college curricula provide a framework for the disciplined approach to gaining knowledge, but it is not nearly enough. There are too many distractions in our lives and on our campuses, so—without a more disciplined approach—we lose focus and fall short of our goals. Colleges have adapted to the commercial and technical requirements for increased specialization. SigEp’s principles are based on a more classical philosophy of education—one that informs the mind, body, and spirit of ways to maintain the proper balance in the midst of increasing complexity. We use tools like goal-setting sessions, “Challenge Trackers,” and holding each other accountable to keep us focused on the proper path. Only through building positive, disciplined habits of mind can we achieve success in terms of our pursuit of knowledge. In doing so, we realize that we can become anything we desire based on what we are willing to learn.

## Strength for the Body

In much the same way, our physical bodies need a disciplined approach in the pursuit of excellence. Getting and staying in good physical condition is not always easy, but it is extremely important, as our bodies serve as the lifelong vessel for our mind and spirit. There are days when it is all too easy to roll over in bed and skip the next workout. There are too many shortcuts to eating right and to avoiding the substances that do us real harm. Here, too, a disciplined approach, motivation from a brother, and accountability for each other come into play. Our sense of brotherly love requires us to encourage and care for each other in pursuit of our physical well-being in much the same way as in our pursuit of knowledge. Effective goal setting and using the “Sound Body Trackers” are excellent tools for enhancing success.

In the pursuit of the Sound Body, we must be aware of a seductive danger: that pursuing a single goal can become an obsession. SigEp teaches us to maintain a proper balance in our pursuit of both knowledge and fitness. To the extent that we pursue one at the expense of other goals, we do our brotherhood and ourselves a real disservice. Balance and moderation are key.

## Relationships That Sustain the Spirit

It is possible to achieve success in building a Sound Mind or Sound Body (or both), yet fail in life’s greater challenges. Our daily newspapers are full of living examples. To ensure we keep our quest for “Sound Mind, Sound Body” in the proper perspective, a third element is required. By building and sustaining positive (virtuous) relations with others, we put in place a dynamic that helps us achieve balance. Of course, this is dependent upon our ability to build *truly* positive relationships—ones that enhance our spirit and motivate us toward positive goals, rather than relationships that can quickly destroy us. This holds true with our relationships to both men and women.

Most of us have found that a deep relationship to faith or a commitment to a time-tested moral philosophy is indispensable for guiding our choices and conduct of relationships. Too often, our society tries to strip away moral foundations from ethical choices in a concerted effort to separate church and state. Though separation of church and state is appropriate for governing a nation, a sound moral foundation is still required for us as individuals, and we must decide from where we will discern our own moral compass. Relationships centered upon brotherly love, mutual respect, and trust provide an environment where it becomes easier to be right and virtuous, and more difficult to do wrong—to ourselves or to others.

SigEp recognizes that we need relationships that encourage us to become part of *something greater than ourselves*. This is why we celebrate our brotherhood and our outreach programs. Through helping our brothers—and those on our campus and community—SigEps experience the balancing virtue of serving others. According to ancient wisdom, we do not exist on this earth for our own purposes. We exist to contribute in making the world a better place for others—and in the process we find ourselves fulfilled and alive with purpose.

Through community outreach and “service learning” we put these ideals into action. Through such action, we learn how to contribute and how to lead. We learn that, through respecting others and building positive relationships, we gain a legitimacy that allows us to lead effectively. This is a skill that our nation requires, but is never enough in supply. Sigma Phi Epsilon will build tomorrow’s leaders in accordance with time-tested principles that have consistently built history’s greatest generations.

## Working Together

The Balanced Man emblem at the beginning of this article states the ideals of “Spirit Healthy, Body Healthy.” Sigma Phi Epsilon is firmly committed to these “life-skill” principles, alongside the cardinal principles of our Founders. There are many paths to excellence, but the paths all share the timeless values of the ancient ones. They taught us the importance of encouraging diversity of perspective. SigEp brings together diverse perspectives from many walks of life, joining together in brotherhood to seek the ideals of our Founders. We balance this richness of

perspective from the undergraduates with the grounding influence and experienced perspective of alumni volunteers. These men continue their brotherhood beyond graduation and share life's lessons and experiences through leadership and mentorship of undergraduates and fellow volunteers. They understand that striving for excellence is truly a lifetime journey.

This Fraternity remains focused on an unending quest for the balance of knowledge, fitness, and stoutheartedness gained by building disciplined habits in the company of our brothers. In Sigma Phi Epsilon, we provide the means to join in the community of others who share a lifelong pursuit of Virtue, Diligence, and Brotherly Love. Within this brotherhood, we provide the tools, the motivation, the encouragement, the accountability, and the experienced perspectives that are essential for development of life-enhancing, balanced leadership. The rest is up to you!