

THE REWARDS AND CHALLENGES OF BEING A SIGMA PHI EPSILON FACULTY FELLOW

When first approached by the members of Sigma Phi Epsilon to consider taking on the role as the fraternity's Faculty Fellow, I was both surprised and honored. Up to that point I had experienced only limited involvement with Greek Life on campus.

In my position as a full-time Premedical Advisor at the University of Arkansas I had come to know a few members of SigEp as their academic advisor, meeting with them to discuss their academic progress, requirements for their chosen major, and their long-term goals for applying to medical school. I had previously met with the new SigEp members as a group during the first few weeks of their freshman semester to talk about campus resources for tutoring and making the transition from high school to college. I must have made an impression.

I did not immediately agree to become the Faculty Fellow. I wanted time to think about the decision and be certain that I was able to follow through on my commitment in terms of time and effort. I read the Sigma Phi Epsilon handbook, "The Lifetime Responsibility of Brotherhood" and came to realize that I wanted to be part of their organization. The mission of Sigma Phi Epsilon is "Building Balanced Leaders for the World's Communities," based on the basic principles of responsibility to self, responsibility to the fraternity, and responsibility to the community. The college years are a critical time for personal growth and development. As a member of the fraternity there are high expectations for achieving academic success, realizing career goals, developing leadership skills, and making a lifetime commitment to citizenship.

So much of what shapes us as adults develops during our college years and as adult mentors we have the duty and responsibility to be part of that process. My enduring memories from college, both as an undergraduate and graduate student, come from the instructors and faculty members that took the time to see me as an individual and offer both academic and personal guidance. The rewards of being a positive influence in a young person's life are immeasurable.

For most of my academic career as a virologist I have been involved in scientific research and I understand the pressure on faculty members today to fund and maintain a productive research program. This is difficult to do without shifting the focus away from the fundamental value of teaching undergraduates and advising students during their critical years in college. As a Faculty Fellow you would have the opportunity to make a difference in the lives of individual students, as mentors in our past undoubtedly did for us.

To be an effective advisor we need to be perceptive and able to develop relationships based on mutual respect and trust. We can aid students by directing them to academic resources on campus, helping them make informed decisions, challenging them to explore their strengths and weaknesses, and encouraging them to take responsibility for achieving academic success and realizing their long-term career goals. For me personally, this is an opportunity that comes with both challenges and rewards but a role that I gladly undertake.

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