

Future of Fraternity Housing: RLC-The Residential Learning Community

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If you have been on a college campus in recent times or even remotely connected to academe, you have heard the phrase, “Learning takes place outside the classroom.” In the Sigma Phi Epsilon Residential Learning Community (RLC), that “outside the classroom learning” is inside the walls of a select few SigEp houses. Not in the sense of “I-learned-a-little-bit-about-leadership” either. No, it is a full blown experience in a different culture with promising results. In fact, we believe it is the future of campus housing. How? Why?

There are four parts of an RLC, and when these four parts are present, the results are quite impressive. They are Faculty Fellow, personal & academic development, facility/learning environment, and network of support. So, what are these parts besides a bunch of fancy words?

1. Faculty Fellows— The Biggest Part of the Equation

Most chapters have a Faculty Advisor, right? In a lot of instances, the Faculty Advisor was a name, someone who signed paperwork and maybe, just maybe, taught SigEps in their classes. The point is—all too often the interaction was limited at best. This is a huge opportunity missed. With the RLC, the Faculty Fellow is a more hands-on volunteer, someone with a job description that includes:

- Holding weekly office hours in the chapter facility.
- Attending chapter meetings to emphasize academics and stay current with events and long-range plans for the Fraternity.
- Sharing meals with chapter members on a regular basis.
- Addressing academic concerns of the men.
- Sharing knowledge of campus resources and academic policies.

High student enrollment coupled with a limited amount of faculty means students and faculty cannot form a mentoring relationship in the classroom. It has to happen on the outside. With an engaged Faculty Fellow, our SigEps are suddenly plugged in with a member of the faculty. Every week there is some interaction. Even if the brothers don't have the same major as the Faculty Fellow, the relationship is still valid. Faculty Fellows open doors on campus by getting our men in touch with the right people, providing SigEps with a resource they would not have otherwise known about. This leads to...

2. Personal & Academic Development

At Iowa State University, Dr. Yvonne Gentzler is a huge resource for the men of the Iowa Beta Chapter. According to **Ryan M. Pirtle, '06**, “Our Faculty Fellow has provided our members with an invaluable

service by providing new ideas for our chapter, classes for our members and advice and tips for academic success.”

Faculty Fellows take an interest in each SigEp and help him reach his goals. The value of his degree is enhanced because of his relationship with a Faculty Fellow.



Illinois Chapter House • RLC



*Dr. Glenn Linden,
Professor of
History at
Southern
Methodist
University. He
is one of two
Faculty Fellows
for the Texas
Upsilon Chapter
and holds weekly
office hours in the
SigEp house.*



Iowa State Chapter House

Copying Genius

The residential college concept comes from the Universities of Cambridge and Oxford, where faculty and staff live among undergraduates. It has been adopted on many campuses nationwide to create smaller, more intimate communities for students involving faculty members. These faculty members mentor students as live-in advisors.

One of the major predictors of a student's success in college is the quality and level of student/faculty interaction. Spending time with faculty outside of the traditional classroom makes a significant difference in the lives of college students. With this philosophy in mind—that students benefit from the presence of a faculty member who takes an active interest in their lives—the Faculty Fellow is a key to the Residential Learning Community.

Today there are 34 RLCs and their combined GPA is a 3.07 versus the all-fraternity GPA of a 2.91.

3. Facility/Learning—Adios Flophouse

The chapter house is a different place when a Faculty Fellow has an office. Members take care to make sure the public areas of the chapter house are immaculate. Some Faculty Fellows have their office hours in the fraternity house. That means students from all across campus go to a SigEp house for academic advising. This alone changes perceptions people have about Sigma Phi Epsilon. Some chapters even go so far as to recruit men based on recommendations from their Faculty Fellow. And why not? The overall standard of living is higher, the expectations are higher and the caliber of men attracted to fraternity is higher.

4. Network of Support—“It Takes a Village...

...to raise a child.” While our chapters are not children, the metaphor is true for an RLC. It takes a partnership with numerous groups—the university, AVC, Headquarters, Educational Foundation, and undergraduates to ensure the RLC is successful. This is because an RLC chapter is held to a higher standard. Academics are higher and the culture is different. RLC status is not gained overnight. There is an accreditation process and, once accredited, an RLC must recertify every five years. A chapter accredited as a Residential Learning Community is eligible to receive a five percent liability insurance discount each year.

RLC at Valparaiso



Left to right: Valparaiso SigEps Kevin R. Hurt, '05; Thomas M. Schmidt, '05; Adam M. King, '06; and Eric W. Funke, '04



Professor Mark Farmer, of the Valparaiso Classics Department, gives a presentation on Greek art and the thought behind it. He also expanded to applications of Greek thought today. This was one of several dinner lectures the chapter has each semester.



Valparaiso's RLC plaque

What is a Faculty Fellow?

A Faculty Fellow is a member of university faculty or academic support staff who mentors and advises students. A Faculty Fellow does not have to be a member of a fraternity or sorority. Working alongside chapter officers and the alumni and volunteer leaders, Faculty Fellows play a critical role in the personal and academic development of members and the development of the Fraternity as a whole. The Faculty Fellow is not meant to replace assigned undergraduate academic advisors. Here are examples of Faculty Fellow activities.

- Teaching a class or seminar in the Residential Learning Community and encouraging other faculty to do the same.
- Promoting student/faculty interaction through cultural and educational programming, such as debates, “fireside chats,” and guest speakers.
- Meeting with the chapter officers to review the chapter’s academic progress, standards, and incentives.
- Bringing other faculty members and administrators to the chapter facility for informal interaction with the chapter.
- Identifying students who are at risk academically and suggesting proactive measures.
- Writing recommendations for students.

For more information about the RLC, contact Bayard Gennert at bayard.gennert@sigep.net.

Georgia Tech SigEps transform a bar



This bar used to be located in the Georgia Tech chapter house.



During the spring semester several brothers helped remove the bar and replaced it with a computer lab.



Today, there is a conference table, three computers and Internet access in the room.

Ninety percent of all Rhodes Scholars cited a relationship with a faculty member as their primary reason for success.