

Final Report Task Force on Student Social Events and Community Standards
Friday, May 3, 2019

Charge

President Val Smith charged the Task Force “to consult broadly throughout the community and to critically examine social life on campus—including Greek life and programming in campus social spaces.” She also asked the Task Force to “examine information from student conduct and safety reports, alcohol and other drug reports, and information from the Title IX Office” with the goal of developing “recommendations for how we ensure that students have safe, healthy, and enriching social lives at Swarthmore.”

Members of the 2018-2019 Task Force on Student Social Events and Community Standards:

- Lisa Meeden, professor of computer science, co-chair
- Aixa Pomales, director of support services, ITS, co-chair
- David Singleton '68, Board of Managers, co-chair
- David Cohen, professor of astronomy
- Alice Holland, director of health and wellness services
- Emily Anne Nolte Jacobstein '07, president of Alumni Council and ex officio member of the Board of Managers
- Landry Kosmalski, head coach for men's basketball
- Arjun Madan '21
- Charlotte Pohl '21
- H. Vincent Poor, Board of Managers
- Tomoko Sakomura, associate professor of art history and associate dean for academic affairs
- Olivia Smith '21
- T. Shá Duncan Smith, associate dean of diversity, inclusion, and community development
- James Terhune, vice president and dean of students

Introduction

The work of the Task Force began by developing a set of guiding principles for campus social life to use in framing our discussions with community members during outreach efforts. These principles are:

1. Social life on campus should be diverse and inclusive, offering students the chance to relax, discover, and grow.
2. Social events should be safe, fun, and positive experiences that are visible to the campus community.
3. A broad range of social spaces should be equitably available to all students to hold both public and private events.
4. Social events should be reasonably simple for students to plan and should allow both alcohol and alcohol-free partying to coexist.

Next the Task Force identified targeted groups of campus community members whose views and recommendations were solicited for consideration in making our recommendations. These groups included:

- Black Cultural Center
- Center for Counseling and Psychological Services
- Dean's Office
- Delta Upsilon Fraternity
- Intercultural Center
- Kappa Alpha Theta Sorority
- Office of Student Engagement
- Organizing for Survivors (O4S)
- Phi Psi Fraternity
- Residential Communities Coordinators
- Student Government Organization
- SwatTeam
- Women's Resource Center
- Worth Student Health Center

In addition, President Smith invited the approximately 16,000 alumni of the College to submit their written feedback, which resulted in hundreds of responses. Members of Alumni Council were invited to participate in two video chat sessions. Finally, a luncheon session open to the campus community, was organized by the Dean's Office, and was attended by approximately 50 individuals including students, faculty, and staff.

We collected a summary of all of the varied, and often contradictory, views that we heard during this outreach process. On March 8, 2019 the Task Force released this collection of community perspectives entitled "[What We've Heard](#)". We invited the community to review this document and let us know if we had missed anything necessary for our deliberations.

Our final step before beginning deliberations was to meet with Public Safety Director Mike Hill and Title IX Coordinator Bindu Jayne to review and discuss data regarding student misconduct on campus.

We began formulating our final recommendations in early April, and it was in the midst of this process that the Phi Psi documents became public. These documents are extremely disturbing and were condemned by College officials, faculty, alumni, as well as by scores of students, who protested outside the room where the final two meetings of the Task Force took place. Since the release of these documents, the Task Force has received over 2,000 emails, with a large majority calling for an end to fraternity leases.

On April 27, 2019 President Smith suspended fraternity activities pending the outcome of an external investigation into the unredacted Phi Psi materials. She has since been clear to differentiate the work of the Task Force from the investigation, which continues. Indeed, the view of the Task Force is that our recommendations are the same as they would have been if the leak of the documents and the fraternities' decisions to disband had not occurred. Our recommendations are reflective of our intensive, nearly year-long process.

The Task Force reached a broad, though not full, consensus on the following recommendations. We have grouped our recommendations into several categories: 1. Fraternities; 2. Alcohol at social events; 3. Planning social events; 4. Spaces for holding social events. We conclude with some broader recommendations.

1. Fraternities

It is inequitable for any student organization to have exclusive, long-term control over a college-owned social space. The practice of leasing space to any student group should be permanently ended.

We want to be clear that the previous recommendation does not extend to the campus spaces provided to student organizations for their functional needs, such as *The Phoenix*, WSRN, and War News Radio.

Patterns of serious misconduct surrounding fraternities are extremely disturbing, and though the fraternities have faced numerous disciplinary actions over the years, significant problems have persisted. The Task Force urges the College to adhere to and to consistently enforce, a system of progressive discipline for all student organizations, with the most serious consequence being a ban on the group.

The Task Force had considerable discussion on the broad question of whether Greek organizations play an appropriate and constructive role in campus life. The Task Force did not reach agreement to make a recommendation on this. We encourage the College to consider

whether or not Greek organizations may continue on a basis comparable to other student groups.

We recommend that the College and students work together to determine the future uses of these houses, in conjunction with efforts to build a student center as part of the forthcoming Sharples renovation. We also recognize the need for these spaces to be renovated in order to meet appropriate campus building standards.

2. Alcohol at social events

A large majority of students either choose not to drink alcohol or are too young to drink legally, so it is important for campus social life to include a strong focus on both dry events and events where those who don't drink feel welcomed. Dry venues like the Crumb Cafe and the Parrish Parlor Parties are welcome additions to campus social life and should be encouraged and supported.

The College will not provide funds for alcohol at student social events. Students of legal age who want to host a party with alcohol must allocate funds for this expense on their own. However, the task force recommends that the Office of Student Engagement provide empty keg shells and taps so that student hosts of legal age need only gather funds for the alcohol itself.

First-year students are most vulnerable to excessive drinking, especially in their first semester on campus. The College should limit parties with alcohol during the first several weeks of the fall semester, and, in particular, we recommend that the practice of allowing a "Disorientation" party be ended.

Currently, alcohol-related issues are the most prevalent student conduct violation on campus. The College should consider additional ways of fostering a more healthy and mature view of alcohol consumption, rather than binge drinking and pre-gaming.

3. Planning social events

Students have expressed that, without fraternity-sponsored events, there is likely to be a deficit of campus social events. This will require an invigoration of student- and College-sponsored social events in a variety of campus spaces. In addition, not enough students seem willing to put forth the effort to plan events because they are uncertain that they can attract enough attendees.

The Task Force believes that the Office of Student Engagement should play a central role in supporting and encouraging a new era of student party hosting. We recommend that a planning process be put in place over the summer, so that there are some large-scale events that will already be in the works for fall 2019.

The Task Force recognizes that student-initiated efforts are likely to be the most successful. We suggest that a student planning group could be formed and return to campus prior to the beginning of the fall semester to assist with this envisioning process.

We encourage the student body to consider reconstituting old traditions, such as weekly movie screenings, and to start new traditions. We have a vibrant and creative student body, and there is no reason that our campus social scene should not reflect these characteristics.

4. Spaces for holding social events

In a series of interviews with 505 students recently undertaken as part of the Sharples planning process, only 20 percent said that the campus has adequate social space. Students reported that their top four social spaces are residence halls, McCabe Library, Cornell Library, and Eldridge Commons.

Perhaps contrarily, we received data indicating that several prime social spaces on campus are used only occasionally and could host many more events. This includes the Olde Club and Paces, both of which are designated as wet spaces, and residence hall lounges. Indeed, the only campus spaces used close to capacity for planned events have been the fraternity houses.

Social life is a very broad term and includes informal get-togethers during a study break or over a meal. At the other end of the scale, it includes planned events aimed at a larger-scale audience and may include refreshments, decorations, and music. The typical pattern at Swarthmore is that the informal events occur daily while the larger-scale planned events tend to occur on Thursday and Saturday evenings. Our recommendations will focus largely on the larger-scale events, but we strongly agree that the informal and smaller events are a very important part of campus social life.

Not surprisingly, informal social life centers on spaces where students are gathered for other purposes, such as studying, a break between classes, or a meal. While these spaces serve a purpose, we believe that Swarthmore students also need to also have a social life that temporarily gets them away from the stress of their academic work and other structured activities. For the most part, we believe that this aspect of social life should be centered on spaces that are designed for this specific restorative purpose and are separate from academic spaces.

In the student interviews, their top priorities for social spaces (in no particular order) were:

- A warm, welcoming social space
- Comfortable seating and a great modern vibe
- Stress-free environment—separate work and play
- Busy, but not too loud or crazy
- A good place to collaborate
- Spaces to display student work
- A place for live music

- Places for small and large groups to gather, but maintain some privacy

To achieve these, we support several steps:

1. Better information should be made available to the entire campus community on the availability of spaces for social events, such as Olde Club, Paces, and various outdoor spaces. The College should continue to provide orientation to students about SwatCentral, the campus scheduling system.
2. When social events are planned, particularly events open to the entire campus community, they should be better publicized.
3. The inventory of social spaces should be reviewed in terms of the priorities cited above and needed improvements should be identified.
4. Although we believe that the current inventory of social spaces is underutilized and could be adequate, we recognize that the lack of a major “student union”-type centralized social space is an issue, particularly in comparison with our peer institutions. Tarble Student Center filled this need before it was destroyed and we are supportive of plans to renovate Sharples in a way that will again provide such a space.

Broader recommendations

The Task Force received information from both Public Safety and the Title IX Office regarding the location of incidents of sexual misconduct and the data indicates that these incidents occur across campus. As the student protestors noted in their statement, “The fraternity is not the only source of sexual violence, racism, homophobia, or misogyny on this campus and ending the leases will not alone end these dynamics that harm so many of us every day.”

Educational outreach about alcohol and drugs, healthy relationships, and diversity and inclusion occurs throughout a student’s time on campus. However, participation in this outreach is traditionally quite low. The College must create more effective ways to encourage student engagement with these key topics. One option might be a required course for students during their first year on campus.

The Task Force also notes that sexual misconduct incidents most often occur after regular business hours and on weekends when Counseling and Psychological Services is closed. The Task Force urges the College to consider additional ways to provide proper care to students during these times of crisis.

Finally, with regard to Public Safety, the Task Force heard that some officers are very effective at dealing with problems arising at student social events, while others are less capable of this. We also heard that students experience differential treatment from officers based on race, sexual orientation, and gender. We encourage Public Safety to closely examine these concerns

and continue to identify ways for students to share their direct experiences with the department through [existing reporting mechanisms](#) and in other ways that build mutual trust and respect.

Conclusion

This Task Force was charged with considering community standards, among other aspects of campus life. Going forward, we recommend that the administration explore ways to consider “how we are doing” as a community in setting and meeting these standards.

The Task Force thanks the entire community for its thoughtful and, at times, deeply personal reflections and insights. The feedback we received informed our process and helped us to develop recommendations that we hope will serve all students in the years ahead.