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A Sorority is Bigger Than What Meets the Eye

When most people hear the word sorority, they stereotype and judge the girls in sororities. Some may say, “ those girls only care about partying and getting drunk,” or some may say, “they are dumb and sluts.” I am a member of Zeta Tau Alpha and I can argue that these stereotypes are not true. A sorority is much more than that. It can be described as a discourse community. A discourse community is a group who has shared goals, shared lexis’, ways of communicating, and has new and old members.

Goals

The members of Zeta Tau Alpha have one specific shared goal, which is breast cancer education and awareness. The members hold events to raise awareness and educate the public; also they raise money for this cause. These members are very passionate about their philanthropy and have this in common with every Zeta in the nation. Many events are held throughout the year but mainly through the month of October because this is breast cancer awareness month. An event such as race for the cure is held every year and everyone wears the color pink and participates in the race. The participants pay a fee that goes towards this cause and a lot of people also donate. The members pass out breast cancer ribbons and t-shirts and collect donations along with helping set up and clean up the event.

Eta Tau is the chapter name for the Zeta Tau Alpha here at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. Along with big events like Race for the Cure, other smaller events here on campus are held. Recently, they created a run for your life race through the campus in which participants had to pay a fee and the money goes towards this cause. Members dressed up as zombies to make it more fun for the participants. Also, members collected Yoplait yogurt lids because each lid gave a small percentage of money to this wonderful cause. Those are just some examples of how they reach their goals and how this sorority cares about this amazing cause and wants to do as much as possible for it.

Every Sunday, the members go to Denny room 220 at 6 p.m. to have chapter meeting. Here, they discuss ways to reach their goals and the steps needed to take. Members of position take roll, go over upcoming events and requirements, and may also discuss our policies or values. At the beginning at each meeting the members recite the creed of Zeta Tau Alpha all together. The members do not dress up unless it is a special meeting such as voting for members of position or ritual where they wear all white. At the meetings, the girls chatter amongst themselves and sit with their closest friends in a classroom like setting. Chapter usually lasts about an hour depending on the week and how much there is to be discussed.

Ways of Communicating

The members of Zeta can communicate in many different and efficient ways. Chapter meetings is a great way to let all the members know what the upcoming events are and what needs to be done. Another way is through the private Facebook page. Pictures of the sisters at events are uploaded and sisters post specific information/details. Sisters can communicate the easiest and quickest through the Facebook page. This is a good way of asking any question one might have concerning anything to do with Zeta Tau Alpha and receive fast responses. Members also use text, call, and email as well but it is not efficient when trying to communicate with the whole chapter. GIN is an online system set up only for sisters to sign up for events, post grades/GPA’S, and other specific things. These are good representations and reflections of their values, goals, and behaviors.

Experts and Novices

In order to gain a position in Zeta, the members decide by electing and then voting. The ones who have the most experience and have past leadership positions and are most passionate about bettering Zeta are the ones that gain the position. Every fall, Zeta gains new members. The size of how many new members Zeta takes is dependent on many factors. It is a mutual selection process, the members must like you and feel like you would fit in and be a good asset and you must feel the same way. Also, one must have at least a 2.5 GPA and be in good standing with the University. After the process called rush is over, new members go through a program where they learn about Zeta Tau Alpha’s polices, values, beliefs, and history. In order to get initiated, you have to pass the test with a 90 percent or better, know the creed by heart, complete Greek Life Education, and attend 90 percent of meetings and events. Through this process, old members (experts) help the new members (novices) and they get a big. A big is an older sister that will be a mentor and a role model for that little. This is the person that a new member goes for advice and guidance. After initiation, you are officially a sister and no longer called a new member.

It is easy to tell who is a new member and who is not for many reasons. New members must wear what is called a pledge pin and they cannot wear letter shirts or wear the crest and cannot call other members sisters. It is a huge honor to be able to wear letter shirts and to be able to call each other sisters. The process to becoming a sister and no longer a new member is worth it and it goes by quickly. The members of position are the most experienced and are qualified as being experts although members without a position are experts as well.

Erica is the president and the biggest expert in this chapter. She is determined to be the best person she can be, better the sorority, and be successful in life which is why she wanted multiple leadership positions. This sorority does not only have the shared goal of breast cancer awareness and education but also sisterhood and lasting friendships and that is the exact reason why she joined.

“Last year, my best friend died and I wanted to drop out of school and disconnect from reality but every single one of my sisters were there for me and helped me through the toughest time in my life and I can honestly say that if I never joined Zeta, I would be a completely different person and not for the better,” said Erica the president. This experience in Zeta made her a stronger person and is a memorable experience because of her sisters in Zeta. She wanted to make a difference and better the sorority that made her a better person so she wanted many leadership positions. She is passionate about her education, Zeta Tau Alpha, and her family.

Research

I chose to interview Erica Bullard because she is the president and her perspective is much different from my own. She is an expert while I am a novice so her perspective brings a new aspect to the paper. As president, Erica faces many obstacles. “Sometimes it is difficult because I have to plan events and make sure everything goes as planned. Sometimes I feel I am not looked at as a sister and friend but the big, mean, scary president. All I want is the best for this sorority and be the best we can be but it isn’t always easy and things don’t always happen smoothly and just the way I would like them to,” she explained.

Since I am an insider of this organization, I already knew a lot of the information I needed for this paper and so it was easy having access to the Facebook page (my artifact) and being able to observe the chapter meeting and a breast cancer awareness event. Another research method that I used was the readings by Swales and Branick that I used to structure and organize my paper.

Conclusion

These girls would do anything for one another but just like sisters in families, there are arguments, disagreements, or fights but at the end of the day these girls have each other’s backs. Every member has a different reason for joining but they are all similar in some way whether it’s for the sisterhood, philanthropy, or service but not one of these members said it was for the parties. Truth is anyone can go to a party or drink alcohol, one doesn’t have to join a sorority for that, it is much bigger than that.