

Beta Theta Pi

Gamma Phi Chapter

Era History 2004-Present (2007)

It seems that every different era in the past 100 years of the Gamma Phi Chapter has been based on change. Regardless of whether this was a major event such as a war or changes in campus and way of life, the men of 800 Chautauqua have never had to move out of the house. [Editor's Note: 800 Chautauqua was used for various non-Beta purposes during World War II.] When presented with challenges and changes, Beta has seemed to adapt and grow.

The years from 2004 to now (2007) are no different. Beginning with my pledge class in the fall of 2004, there were different issues that the house was faced with and had to make a decision to either change or continue in the same manner.

Our pledge class had to follow the so-called "year of the Beta." The 2003-2004 school year included winning grades, second in U-Sing, first in homecoming, first in Scandals and winning the ever-important President's Trophy for fraternities. You could say that we had a tough act to follow, but we were out to make a name for ourselves.

Rush and Tragedy

Most freshmen moved in on August 19, 2004, and the partying started almost immediately. Starting with that Thursday night, partying at the Beta house seemed like a staple in fraternity culture. Once rush started that Sunday, most future pledges knew what house they were going to sign with. By that Wednesday, there were roughly 59 men that stood as the new Beta pledge class.

From Marietta, Georgia to The Woodlands, Texas, our pledge class was definitely diverse. We had a black guy (Flowers), a guy in a wheelchair (Dana), metrosexuals (Keck and Whitaker), fat guys (that number continues to grow) and so on.

It wasn't until a month down the road that our pledge class really came together and the campus was, in a way, scared straight. The week after we hosted a hall party with the Sigma Chis and the night before we were about to have another hall party, a Sigma Chi pledge, Blake Hammontree, died of alcohol poisoning.

Needless to say, this caused a rather big impact on the lives of everyone on campus. Fraternities put a hold on all parties, Sigma Chi was removed from campus and OU administration started its investigation into the effects of alcohol on a college campus.

That's not to say that every Thursday, Friday and Saturday night we didn't drink in the Beta house. We'd usually double up on a 30 pack (Keystone Light or Natural Light) and stake our hold on the basement.

Girls

We did University Sing with the Pi Phis, which accounted for a majority of the hookups and girlfriends (some that semester, some still current). However, Pi Phis were not the only girls that would come over to party with us.

We started hanging out with Thetas a lot during October. They were classy, smart girls who could party. Alpha Chis (well it seemed at the time) had a good pledge class. We'd often hang out with them as well as Tri-Delts and some Kappas. Chi-Os made their way into the house spring 2005 thanks to Scandals. It's fair to say that there was usually never a shortage of girls at Beta parties.

Pledge Activities

I think we were all a little intimidated and overwhelmed at the beginning of pledgeship. But despite a usually absent pledge trainer, we seemed to usually be on top of our game. Michael Kurtz, president of the house at the time, led us in the right direction most of the time, but it was essentially our pledge class that took it upon ourselves to get through that semester.

Our pledge class president Eks Wye Pollock and vice president Chase Tucker were removed in the middle of the semester for what, according to

them, seemed like a good idea. Because neither Kurtz nor our “pledge trainer” were going to be at a Friday night house clean, Kurtz advised us to have our walkout for that Friday night. Since it was too short notice to go through with our planned walkout, Eks Wye decided to have a “four corners walkout.” This meant, everyone go wherever you want.

Some of us went to Edmond to Eks Wye’s house, some to College Station for the A&M game and some just went home. This didn’t settle well with the members come Sunday night. Enter Ross Clemens as pledge class president. We somehow liquidated our entire pledge fund with our first party with Ross as president, but it was a hell of a show. We had Gatorade jugs full of trash can punch and troughs full of beer.

I think everyone’s favorite pledge brother to hate was Braden Pollard. Braden was always able to get us in trouble. His plans to pull pranks on the house seemed to not only piss off the members but his pledge brothers as well. Our “favorite” was when he and a few others got locked in the basement trying to pull a prank at 4 in the morning, then spraying a fire extinguisher up the member stairs. They weren’t allowed to leave until every one of our pledge brothers was woken up and told to come to the house to get him. That probably led to us not really caring when Braden almost got kicked out.

Despite all the screw ups, most of us were initiated in January.

Changing Campus

Beginning in January 2005, President David Boren implemented an alcohol policy banning any and all alcohol from fraternity houses and dorms as well as a three strikes policy for alcohol offenses. Three times caught with alcohol and the fraternity is kicked off campus. Three alcohol offenses for a student, and the student is kicked off campus. This caused a backlash from fraternity members and alumni but to no avail.

The house was faced with a major decision. Either continue in the same manner or adapt with the alcohol policy. This was not an easy or quick decision or adaptation. But slowly and surely as semesters went on, the house seemed to move parties from the house to off campus locations whether we agreed with the policy or not.

A Tragedy of Our Own

In April 2005 the Beta house was faced with a tragedy of our own. One of my pledge brothers, Patrick James Frensley, was struck by a train while running down Lindsey Street and died. It was something that put the entire house in shock. When you're a freshman at OU, you can sometimes feel like you're invincible. But this brought us all back down to reality. Frensley had touched so many lives that hundreds of people including Betas, Ruf-Neks (which he was also a member), Chi-Os (who we were doing Scandals with at the time) and many other friends packed the Union for a memorial service.

He was a guy who was always on the go. Whether it be running all the way to 24th Avenue and calling a pledge brother to come pick him up, annoying us with his cricket sounds or running along with the Sooner Schooner for football games, he was a guy full of life and energy. That life in energy still remain in the now annual Frensley 5K run headed by Bryan Luff and worked on by many pledge brothers and now younger guys in the house. ~kai~ 2654 of ever honored memory.

Living in the House

Though we could no longer have hall parties in the Beta house, there was never a shortage of activity or pure stupidity. Who could forget Cullen Greer getting a door slammed into his face giving him a black eye. Or Andy Bennett, for the only time in college, having a girl in his room only to have the power go out while she was over, then running out in the hall naked flapping his stuff for everyone to see. The girl then walked out into the hall to chants of "walk of shame" and gave everyone the finger while walking to the bathroom. Straight class.

If I could, this entire history would be written about the stupid things we did living in. But it A. Wouldn't do justice to the rest of the history of this and B. I can't remember most of the stuff we did. It was the dirtiest, grossest and most fun two years I've ever had in my life.

In fall 2006, chapter president Brad Brown was served with a notice that we were in violation of the alcohol policy and were subject to a strike under the policy. This led to a tense time for everyone involved. Many sophomores were called in to the university to be interviewed and the house

literally became alcohol free. This marked the first time in Beta history that we had no alcohol in the Beta house. I don't know if that's a good thing or a bad but it definitely contributed to us staying out of trouble. Thanks to the hard work of Zach Allen, Brad Brown, new president Matt Brown and the rest of the chapter, we avoided a strike and remain as the oldest house on campus to have never been kicked off of campus.

Two Years of Rush

I had the rare opportunity to serve on two rush teams, one as an assistant and one as the head rush chairman. I can safely say that being on the rush team is a lot more fun than being the guy in charge. Living in an apartment paid for and having a job recruiting new Betas were the best two summers I think anyone could ever have. Even though I wanted to kill the rest of the rush team members by the end of each summer, there are memories (and pictures) that will last forever.

The first summer involved Colin Drake, Tyler Jennings, Jon McCartney and me traveling all across the state and meeting well over 200 guys to join our great fraternity. The summer included 'roid rage, trashing the Dickinsons' apartment, floating the river twice, reading Hustlers as Drake crashed into a lady's car, driving on sidewalks in Tulsa after a three kegger at Adam Alonso's and many, many more incidents that we could all tell you about if you ever want to know.

The next summer was much the same. I was in charge that summer along with Lane Gibbs, Jordan Carter and John Gawey. This summer included margarita machines, losing the rush card in The Dragon in Lawton, Gawey hooking up with sloppies and again, so much more that we'd all love to talk about.

Being on rush team was something that none of us would trade in for the world. It was a fun, semi-harmless experience that we could all look back on and be very thankful that we're still alive.

2007 and Beyond

After another successful rush in the fall, Beta doesn't seem to have skipped a beat. Yes, the house has changed since I was a freshman, but the traditions are still the same. We don't have huge parties in the house

anymore but we still know who Pater Knox is. If there is anything to say about Beta from 1907 to now, it's that we are the same fraternity based on the principles we were founded on in 1839. We can all say the Loyalty before a match burns down. We all care. A lot of people say that what happened to Sigma Chi in 2004 wouldn't happen to us at Beta, and I can't disagree. It's a sense of actual brotherhood that we hold at 800 Chautauqua based on our very first principle.

We learn how to evolve and change with the world, campus and any other challenge. But we don't settle mediocrity as we continue to win grades, Knox awards, president trophies and remain at the top of fraternities at the University of Oklahoma. I think we would all be disappointed if our sons don't sign Beta at OU because no matter what, we will always feel that closeness to the house, that sense of belonging. That's why I am and will always be proud to be called a Beta.

Yours in ~kai~,

Theo Coleman
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