

OPINION

Teaching UCSD to live like Greeks

Greek housing can help turn the campus into a student village ...

By HANNA CAMP
Associate Opinion Editor

UCSD is so highly academic, so focused on research and learning, that making it an administrative priority to bring Greek housing closer to campus seems ill-fitting. Even those of us who have never actually seen "Animal House" know the frat-boy/sorority-chick stereotype well enough to fear it. Since the Greek system at UCSD is not as omnipresent as it is at other universities, what could be a bigger waste of money than an effort to get them houses near campus? Quite frankly, the bigger waste would be sinking more money into on-campus dorms that serve more as a temporary stopping point than the center of a vibrant community.

We all know academic life and social life aren't easy to balance over four years, but UCSD Greeks seem to be doing as well as anyone and better than some ["Housing or not, balanced life goes on for Greeks," the *Guardian*, Nov. 7]. According to Panhellenic Council President Heather Doshay, Greeks report a higher average GPA than the UCSD population as a whole, and it's not by accident. They require a minimum GPA of 2.5 and have officers that enforce scholarship standards and recognize members with good grades. Members attest to higher levels of university pride as a result of their involvement in the organizations, as well as a greater sense of belonging. It's also well-known that Greek alumni more often donate to their alma mater.

That mentality, if encouraged, could be a relatively quick and effective way of improving UCSD's sense of community, as well as its social life and lackluster rate of alumni donations. There is no more traditional method for establishing a college social scene than putting Greek housing close to campus, and UCSD Greeks have proved that they aren't the air-headed party animals that make some fraternities more of a joke than a point of pride. But in La Jolla, housing is only slightly easier to find than an "S" spot near Center Hall, and much more expensive than a parking permit. Hence the need for administration support.

The problem, from the administration's perspective, is that Greeks represent less than 10 percent of the student body and UCSD currently doesn't guarantee both general and transfer students two years of on-campus housing. As a result, they don't consider establishing Greek housing to be a priority. Vice Chancellor of Student Affairs Joseph W. Watson in particular argues that until all students have at least a two-year housing guarantee, UCSD shouldn't fund housing that isn't equally accessible to all students.

But equal distribution and access to university housing for all students is hardly a rule. International House is a great example of an institution that not all students have full access to. It's not just near campus, it's on campus, and even though we help pay for it, no student is guaranteed a space; they must apply and be selected, not unlike a fraternity. Eleanor Roosevelt College's new facilities are shiny and accessible — unless you belong to another college.

Some make the argument that more on-campus housing will help improve the student scene at UCSD, and therefore the administration's priorities are valid. Commuter students far outnumber those living in dorms on campus, and they usually live at least 15 minutes away because of the lack of close, affordable housing. As a result, they tend to stay closer to home in their free time. This is no doubt one of the main factors behind the dreary state of campus life.

But this is exactly what a concerted effort to bring the most socially-savvy student organizations closer to home can solve. There's certainly no reason to assume it's going to happen with the construction of more dorms. We have more dorms now than we did four years ago, but few would say that they've had any kind of effect on social life. All entering freshmen already receive a two-year guarantee, and even though do not, enrollment at UCSD did not drop. Neither UCLA nor UC Berkeley offers a two-year housing guarantee, and their students survive just fine.

The message of the very long Student Satisfaction Survey released this year was that the entire school needs to break out of the rut it has found itself in and start trying new things. That includes the administration. Not all the benefits of Greek housing will go to all students, but the improved sense of community, the establishment of a growing "student village" around UCSD, is something we can all benefit from. A Greek Row alone won't do it, but it will be a definite step in the right direction, a sign that we've begun to create a real campus village, rather than a campus surrounded by towns that happen to house students.

Just think about how often students complain about nothing happening on campus, versus how often they complain about not getting a dorm room for their second year. The administration has to resist the urge to do more of the same-old, same-old if they want to improve campus life.

... But that won't address the main problems of campus life

By MEGHAN DURHAM
Contributing Writer

While moving Greek housing closer to campus may improve the social scene at UCSD, not everyone on campus is involved in the Greek system. No matter how big fraternities and sororities get, the availability of guaranteed on-campus housing will always affect more students. Out of approximately 20,400 undergraduates at UCSD, according to 2004 student research and information, the UCSD Panhellenic Council reports that 1,200 are involved in the Greek system. Even if this is a low estimate, that's still less than 10 percent. And perhaps there are other reasons for the lackluster social scene at UCSD.

UCSD is a major commuter school, and this could be as much a factor of its relative lack of community spirit as not having a frat row. As it stands now, except for the lucky few who gain admission into International House or are otherwise allowed to remain on campus, most of those beyond their sophomore year are forced to commute. Other students choose to remain at home to avoid the heavy cost of housing fees in addition to tuition. Many of these students, confronted with the long commute to and from campus, find that they don't hang around as often as they might want to. "Once I get finished with classes all I want to do is beat the traffic home," Revelle College junior Ashok Pathi said. "I never go to college events like I did when I lived on campus."

Indeed, as students are faced with various housing dilemmas such as condominium conversions ["Conversions upgrade students to homelessness," the *Guardian*, Oct. 31], they find themselves forced to live even farther from campus. And as Manager of Commuter Student Services Deborah Gordon remarked in that article, "students are losing their roots to the UCSD community." Currently, the administration doesn't consider Greek housing a priority; choosing instead, according to Vice Chancellor of Student Affairs Joseph W. Watson, to wait until all students, including transfer students, can be guaranteed at least two years of housing. Some proponents of Greek housing, such as former candidate for A.S. Vice President External Nam Bui, have argued that a fraternity row would make UCSD alumni more likely to donate to the school. But universities also gain money from attracting more students, and universities certainly use guaranteed housing as a selling point for incoming students. The Lombardi Program on Measuring University Performance, a university research group, reports that, for the most part, universities today are selling context (such as campus environment) over the academic content, and that a major component of that advertised context is guaranteed housing. It is possible that UCSD could attract more students — and as a result, more money — if they offered guaranteed housing, even for only two years.

But there is also the question of why fraternities would want to be near campus in the first place? Other universities, such as the University of South Florida, have required fraternities and sororities that live on campus to sign an agreement that would allow university police to enter their premises without prior notification. UCSD students already know quite well the tough stance that the administration and Vice Chancellor Watson have taken toward alcohol consumption. And given the university's prior record of cracking down on student parties, it is likely that university officials would be over-the-top in their safety requirements and policing of houses that are university-sanctioned, what with the unfortunate stereotype of drunken revelry that the Greek system has in the public mind. And although a near-campus house may provide an increase in recruitment, it could also change the personality of the Greek system at UCSD and potentially attract more undesirable pledges.

Fraternity and sorority houses are useful, according to Collin Reinking, a member of Sigma Nu, as they provide a place for meetings and to store materials such as signs. But students don't join because they want to be in a house. "In the end you don't rush for a house, you rush because you find a community you enjoy," Reinking said.

Besides, just allowing fraternities and sororities to live near campus is not going to change the culture at UCSD. There is more to a social scene than a fraternity row, but perhaps the culture here doesn't need to be changed. According to NPR's "Talk of the Nation," having an image of a "party" school is usually considered negative. When such a ranking occurs in a profile such as the Princeton Review, many schools seek out ways to change that ranking. There already is one party school in the area, and San Diego State University is well within range of students seeking out a party but far enough away for us to avoid the negative affects of messy, drunken partygoers, and loud noise. Perhaps UCSD's more subdued social atmosphere and higher academic ranking is not a negative, but rather a benefit to the students on this campus.

Ashley Green/*Guardian*

Should the UCSD administration make it a priority to bring Greek housing closer to campus?

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