

## Cal Poly fraternities and sororities getting new oversight

Cynthia Lambert and AnnMarie Cornejo - [clambert@thetribunenews.com](mailto:clambert@thetribunenews.com)  
[acornejo@thetribunenews.com](mailto:acornejo@thetribunenews.com)

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An entrance to Cal Poly in San Luis Obispo. [jjohnston@thetribunenews.com](mailto:jjohnston@thetribunenews.com)

*Correction: An earlier version of this story incorrectly described Cal Poly's action toward deferred recruitment. As part of its agreement with students, Cal Poly has agreed to reverse its policy on deferred rush.*

Cal Poly is increasing its oversight of Greek organizations by requiring them to register parties, adopt new alcohol policies and participate in programs on alcohol safety, anti-hazing and sexual assault awareness.

At the same time, the university will work to invite additional fraternities and sororities to Cal Poly to give students more options to get involved, and fraternity and sorority members will start paying a small fee to fund education and outreach.

The changes come after a number of alcohol-related incidents over the past 11 years that led to the deaths of two students and the suspension or elimination of several chapters from the campus, and brought negative attention to the university.

The three councils governing Cal Poly's 25 Greek chapters have each committed to the concepts, but the details of the policies will be worked out collaboratively between university administrators and student leaders.

About 3,000 students participate in Greek organizations, about 16 percent of the total student body.

“This is an opportunity for everyone to come together and make Cal Poly Greek life better than it is,” said Jason Colombini, president of the Interfraternity Council, which governs and advises Cal Poly’s 17 social fraternities. “Cal Poly is taking more of a role in recognizing the Greek life on campus and wanting to take ownership of it.”

The new policies could also improve the sometimes tenuous relationship between students and San Luis Obispo residents.

San Luis Obispo police Chief Steve Gesell said that the proposed changes will translate into a healthier community both on and off campus for students and permanent residents.

The new policies will be phased in over a three-year period starting this fall at a pace that allows the students to help develop them, said Keith Humphrey, Cal Poly’s vice president for student affairs.

“The main purpose behind the changes is to enhance the health, safety and academic success of fraternity and sorority members,” he said. “That includes many aspects, including consumption of alcohol.”

Colombini, incoming president of Associated Students Inc. (ASI) and a member of Zeta Beta Tau, said the conversation about the policy changes started earlier in the year after the Interfraternity Council submitted a recommendation to reverse a campus policy on deferred recruitment.

That policy — which barred first-year men from joining fraternities before their second quarter at Cal Poly — was instituted in 2010 after freshman Carson Starkey died in 2008 in an alcohol-related fraternity hazing incident.

Cal Poly has agreed to reverse its deferred rush policy as part of the compromise agreement made with the Interfraternity Council and the other two groups overseeing Greeks on campus, Panhellenic and the United Sorority & Fraternity Council.

Among the first steps, Colombini said, is to work out the details of the party registration policy, with the goal of having an interim policy in place by winter quarter. Greek organizations might have to register a party if chapter funds or resources are being used, for example, Humphrey said.

“Again, this is a decision down the road, but we might require the event to have a security presence,” he said. “If it’s a smaller event it might be a team of student leaders who monitor the event to make sure the agreements are upheld.”

Colombini said initially he was wary of the party registration concept, and later learned it’s a fairly common idea at colleges in the Eastern and Southern parts of the United States.

“What made me OK is that everyone is going to be around the table deciding,” he said. “We have an equal voice in creating what this policy is going to be.”

Gesell said the changes mark a “paradigm shift” for President Jeff Armstrong and his administration.

“It’s been evident over the past year that there is an authentic dedication to students’ academic success and an understanding that conduct, on and off campus, is important to the individual student, university

and community,” he said. “Many times, stakeholder involvement like this achieves far greater and lasting results than any enforcement effort could.”

The plan will shape what Greek life at Cal Poly looks like for years, Colombini noted. University officials also want to start discussions about an on-campus Greek row — which could bring another host of changes for Greek members.

Cal Poly consulted with Aware Awake Alive, the nonprofit group founded by Starkey’s family, in creating the new policies. Starkey was pledging Sigma Alpha Epsilon, which was suspended indefinitely from campus and will likely never be able to restart at Cal Poly.

In 2011, the Sigma Phi Epsilon fraternity was revoked from campus after an underage drinking party, and that same year the Alpha Phi sorority was suspended for five months because it allowed a hazing incident to occur at a function.

In 2002, 19-year-old student Brian Gillis died after reportedly attending a fraternity party. Gillis’ family members said they believe that he was given a drug-laced drink and that fraternity members from Sigma Chi played a role in killing him.

But the District Attorney’s Office never filed charges, citing insufficient evidence. The fraternity was banned from campus for 25 years.

Colombini, who turns 21 Friday, said his 56-member fraternity has a strict no-

tolerance policy toward hazing. Most Greek organizations abide by policies set by their national groups.

“Alcohol (use) is often stereotyped on fraternities, but I don’t drink,” he said. “It’s not something hugely predominant with all Greeks.”

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