



OMEGA PHI ALPHA

Legislative Agenda for Discussion

Convention 2021

Approved by Legislation Committee

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Overview

This document provides detail on all proposed amendments to our national constitution and bylaws. It is important that voting delegates discuss these amendments with fellow members

These proposed amendments are quite substantive. This means that during Convention, each amendment will be separately considered, discussed, and voted on.

It is important to note that ratification of amendments to:

- the national **constitution** requires an **affirmative vote of three-fourths** of the ballots cast by voting delegates.
- the national **bylaws** require an **affirmative vote of two-thirds** of the ballots cast by voting delegates.

All ratified amendments to the national constitution and bylaws take effect upon the final adjournment of Convention.

Proposed Constitutional Amendments

Constitutional Proposal #1

Author:

Esther Blue de Avalos

Which portion of the document would be amended?

The Constitution and bylaws in their entirety.

This section currently reads as follows:

All references to colonization, colony, colonist(s)

The proposed amendment:

Replace all references to these terms with their corresponding replacement.

Colonization → Expansion, Colony → Prospective Chapter, Colonist(s) → Prospective Chapter Member(s)

What is the rationale behind this amendment?

The terms Colonization, Colony, and Colonist(s) are hurtful and harmful because they are historically associated with the system of oppression and genocide of the ancestors of our Black, Hispanic/Latine, and Indigenous American members.

The team that oversees this department of the organizational leadership team is currently referred to as the Expansions team. The term Colonization should be changed to Expansion to reflect this relationship and eliminate the negative connotations associated with the current term.

The term Colony and Colonist(s) should be changed to New Chapter and New Member(s) respectively. In citing precedent, it should be noted that Omega Phi Alpha changed its Recruitment vocabulary to New Member. The process of onboarding a new chapter and the education period of the new members mirrors the recruitment and new member education process. Therefore, in an effort to combat this negative stigma, our organization should use terminology that is respectful and culturally competent. Members of the Diversity and Inclusion Committee were proud to welcome a new member from Old Dominion University to their committee who is the first new member from a new chapter to serve on an OPA committee. Some members of the committee have already made an intentional effort to stop using the terms Colonization, Colony, and Colonist(s) and have chosen to refer to the new chapter by the name of the University instead. We are also choosing to describe the new member on our team as a new member or by name. This intentional culture shift allows our team to avoid the hurtful and harmful language that causes deep pain to members every time it is uttered aloud.

It should also be noted that Greek Track the platform provider for OPAportal has stopped using this set of terminology as well. Greek Track has stated that, “We have reviewed our products and have made the decision to remove all references to “colonies” and “colonization” from our system. We believe that these references minimize the destructive and long-lasting impact that imperialist colonization has had on cultures around the world, and we will advise our partner organizations to use a different naming convention for their prospective chapters moving forward. We have adopted the term “prospective chapters” to denote groups that are in the process of becoming full established members of their national organization, and we encourage all fraternities and sororities to examine their own naming conventions for the expansion process in order to remove oppressive language.”

Constitutional Proposal #2

Author:

Esther Blue de Avalos

Which portion of the document would be amended?

The Constitution and bylaws in their entirety.

This section currently reads as follows:

All references to “sister” or “sisters”

The proposed amendment:

Replace all references to these terms with their corresponding replacement.

Sister → Member

Sisters → Members

What is the rationale behind this amendment?

The terms sister and sisters are gendered language that establish a gender norm in Omega Phi Alpha. This goes against our responsibility to maintain an environment free of discrimination. Article IV, Section 13 established a policy that ascribes the gendered terminology to all members regardless of their gender. This policy is not equitable, inclusive, or respectful of the different gender identities and expressions that our members hold.

Omega Phi Alpha does not discriminate based on gender identity or expression when granting membership. OPA is not a single-gender organization and our terminology should reflect the diversity of the membership. The constitution and bylaws however currently use the term sister or sisters only 32 times, while the term member or members is used 268 times. To be equitable and inclusive of the diverse gender identities and expressions held by our membership, our language should change to refer to members as such.

Omega Phi Alpha membership was initially limited to women on campus who had been Girl Scouts or Camp Fire Girls. Today our organization doesn't require previous experience with those groups and our members identify with many different gender identities and expressions. Additionally, the service fraternity Alpha Phi Omega who helped establish and organize our organization is now co-educational. This historical context demonstrates that organizations can change to be more inclusive of different people.

Many members may have heard of the “golden rule” that states that you should treat others how you would like to be treated, but our organization should strive to a higher standard and follow the “platinum rule” and treat others the way they would like to be treated so our internal operations are validated by the external communication that touts respect for differences with gender-neutral language.

Some members of the Diversity and Inclusion Committee wondered how a chosen familial relationship could be expressed between our members. It was suggested that the terms sibling or siblings should be adopted to express that relationship in a gender-neutral manner. This cultural shift would allow us to be respectful of others while still acknowledging how our strong bonds of friendship connect our members as one chosen family.

Constitutional Proposal #3

Author:

Esther Blue de Avalos

Which portion of the document would be amended?

The Constitution and bylaws in their entirety.

This section currently reads as follows:

All references to the “nations of the world” area of service

The proposed amendment:

Replace all references to “nations of the world” with “world community”.

What is the rationale behind this amendment?

In order to more intentionally express our role as members of the world community, we recommend the phrase “nations of the world” be changed to “world community”.

The term “nations of the world” connotes nebulous or exotic places and fails to describe our responsibility as world neighbors who strive to embody the humanitarian pillar of the organization on a grander scale.

When our members participate in community service, we are held to an ethical and professional standard to responsibly engage in a mutually beneficial, cross-cultural partnership that requires due diligence for sustainable service while growing our cultural perspectives, allowing our members the opportunity to examine multifaceted issues that impact diverse people around the globe.

In addition, the shift of the wording maintains consistency of language as the term community is used in the purpose and goals when describing the “university community” and the “community at large.”

Furthermore, it reaffirms the importance of community, which signifies our continual work towards building diverse relationships through a lens of cultural humility and strive to positively engage various communities and ecosystems at every level - school, city, state, country, continent, and world community - and hopefully affect sustainable, change through equitable service, respectful of the diverse and potentially intricate systems and dynamics of, but not limited to: governance, infrastructure, politics, religious beliefs, communication practices, social constructs, power, cultures, and intersectionality of the community’s members.

Constitutional Proposal #4

Author:

Kasey Stevens

Which portion of the document would be amended?

Article III in its entirety

This section currently reads as follows:

Article III in its entirety – currently includes 3 national policies (Alcohol & Illegal Drug, Discrimination & Harassment, & Hazing) and a section on policy violations.

The proposed amendment:

Strike the article in its entirety and renumber subsequent sections accordingly.

What is the rationale behind this amendment?

This article, which includes only SOME of our national policies (Alcohol & Illegal Drug, Discrimination & Harassment, & Hazing), should be removed from the national constitution.

By keeping these policies in the national constitution, we are only able to amend at Convention every 2 years. Instead, these cornerstone policies should live in our Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) which includes policies, procedures and instructions. While these policies are integral to our organization, it is imperative that they be moved to SOP so that they are more easily amended and approved by the Board of Directors as issues arise and additions or edits must be made.

Additionally, not all our policies live in the constitution (Social Media, Privacy, Accessibility) all live as stand-alone policies.

Constitutional Proposal #5

Author:

Corey Goodburn

Which portion of the constitution would be amended?

Article XIII, Section 10

This section currently reads as follows:

Section 10. To attain alumnae chapter status, the alumnae group must petition the Alumnae Membership Director and complete a provisional period of at least two years. The petition must include the following information:

Sub-clause 1. Location of the group.

Sub-clause 2. Names and respective chapters of all members.

Sub-clause 3. Chapter goals and reasons for desiring chapter status.

Sub-clause 4. Names and addresses of all elected officers.

Sub-clause 5. A \$25 nonrefundable petition fee.

The proposed amendment:

Section 10. To attain alumnae chapter status, the alumnae group must petition the Alumnae Membership Director and complete a provisional period of at least one year during which the group must complete all required events.

Clause 1. The petition for alumnae chapter status must include the following information:

Sub-clause 1. Location of the group.

Sub-clause 2. Names and respective chapters of all members.

Sub-clause 3. Chapter goals and reasons for desiring chapter status.

Sub-clause 4. Names and addresses of all elected officers.

Sub-clause 5. A \$25 nonrefundable petition fee.

Clause 2. Required events include 2 events in each of the following categories which are defined in standard operating procedure: sisterhood, service, leadership, and tradition.

What is the rationale behind this amendment?

We are amending the language to improve the alumnae chapter process. As of now, we have to complete 4 required events per year as a provisional chapter. If we do 8 events for our first year, we should be able to become an official alumnae chapter of Omega Phi Alpha. We are not saying you have to complete it in a year, but we are just amending the language so future alumnae chapters a choice. Also, we wanted to clarify what events are required for provisional alumnae chapters.

Constitutional Proposal #6

*This proposal was moved from the Consent Agenda. It was previously Constitutional Consent Proposal #2.

Author:

Kasey Stevens

Which portion of the document would be amended?

Any reference to the word “Alumnae, alumna” in both the Constitution and Bylaws

This section currently reads as follows:

Alumnae and alumna

The proposed amendment:

Replace any reference to the plural word “alumnae” with “alumni”

Replace any reference to the singular word “alumna” with “alum”

What is the rationale behind this amendment?

“Alumnae” and “alumna” are the feminine plural and singular forms of this noun respectively.

According to many resources, “alum” is the singular, gender-neutral term for someone who has graduated from an educational institution, which “alumni” is the plural, gender-neutral or mixed-gender term for a group of graduates.

Replacing the current gendered noun with a non-gendered form (“alum” and “alumni”) will be more inclusive for members of Omega Phi Alpha who are gender non-conforming, trans, or otherwise self-identified, and who may not prefer to be referred to in the feminine sense.

Proposed Bylaws Amendments

Bylaws Proposal #1

Author:

Alyssa Bernhardt

Which portion of the bylaws would be amended?

Article III, Section 3

This section currently reads as follows:

Section 3. A member on leave of absence has the right to attend social and service functions, participate in meetings, wear the letters, and receive the Chevron. Said member cannot vote on sorority issues, hold local, regional, or national office, serve as a convention delegate, or have a little sister. Said member does not pay national dues and is not included in chapter-level awards programs.

1. A member must petition the Chapter Standards Board for leave of absence status.
2. A member with special circumstances, who cannot complete the first active term immediately after activation, may petition the National Standards Board for a leave of absence.
3. A member may have up to two chapter granted leave of absence terms. After two leave of absence terms, a sister must petition the National Standards Board by contacting the National Standards Board chair for any additional leave of absence terms. All petitions must be filed by September 15 for the fall semester and February 15 for the spring semester.
4. After serving at least one active term, if a member wishes to have leave of absence status, said member must petition the chapter standards board.
5. A leave of absence may not be granted for longer than two academic terms at a time. In the case of a yearlong school-related absence, a member may petition the National Standards Board for alumna status by contacting the National Standards Board chair.
6. The Chapter Standards Board has the right to revoke a member's leave of absence status if the reason a sister requested the leave of absence is found to be false or if the original reason has changed.
 - Sub-clause 1. This must be done before the Membership Status Report Form is due. If the leave of absence was granted at the end of the previous term, a decision must be made by the second meeting of the current school term.
 - Sub-clause 2. This decision must have a unanimous vote from the Chapter Standards Board.
 - Sub-clause 3. A Chapter Standards Board cannot revoke a member's emergency leave of absence.

The proposed amendment:

- Section 3. A member on leave of absence has the right to attend service functions, participate in meetings, wear the letters, and receive the Chevron. Said member cannot vote on sorority issues, hold local, regional, or national office, serve as a convention delegate, or have a little sister. Said member pays reduced national dues not to exceed 25% of current active dues is not included in chapter-level awards programs.
1. After serving at least one active term, if a member wishes to have leave of absence status, said member must petition the chapter standards board.
 2. A leave of absence may not be granted for more than one academic term.
 3. The Chapter Standards Board has the right to revoke a member's leave of absence status if the reason a sister requested the leave of absence is found to be false or if the original reason has changed.
 - Sub-clause 1. This must be completed prior to the due date for updating member statuses each semester. If the leave of absence was granted at the end of the previous term, a decision must be made by the second meeting of the current school term.
 - Sub-clause 2. This decision must have a unanimous vote from the Chapter Standards Board.
 - Sub-clause 3. A Chapter Standards Board cannot revoke a member's emergency leave of absence.

What is the rationale behind this amendment?

The purpose behind this proposal is to restructure the LOA membership status to be in line with other social and service collegiate organizations. It also allows our chapters to set the expectations for members in regards to participation and engagement so that multiple LOA semesters are not necessary.

This proposal serves to clarify that LOA status is a temporary condition and does not continue for multiple semesters.

The proposed change in the main text removes the national dues stipulation and opens the opportunity to charge members on LOA up to 25% of national active dues (no amount specified as dues can change with each budget) for the services that are still provided by the national organization while holding that status. The national organization provides insurance coverage for all members that attend official OPA functions, meetings, etc., provides OPAportal, as well as creates and send the Chevron which is covered by national membership dues.

This proposal also removes the opportunity for members on LOA to attend official social events. If a member on LOA is available to attend social and service events as well as meetings, they can maintain active status.

Striking clause 1 because it is repetitive with clause 4.

Striking clause 2 removes the opportunity for a new member to go LOA in their first active semester, except in cases of study abroad and internship (automatic LOA per constitution). This also minimizes the number of statuses that the NSB votes on so that NSB can focus on upholding the standards of the organization instead of on membership statuses.

Striking clause 3 removes the ability for chapters to grant two semesters of LOA. In the Constitution, Article 4, Section 6, Clause 2 – the CSB can grant a onetime LOA for a member so keeping this clause here contradicts the constitution. A member who takes longer than a one semester leave of absence loses a great deal of experience as an active member and has a more challenging time transitioning back into active membership.

The changes to clause 5 clarifies that only 1 LOA may be taken and also eliminates LOA requests to the NSB.