



Alpha Phi Omega

National Service Fraternity

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At its best, Alpha Phi Omega provides an excellent example of synergy where the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. We take individual college students interested in service and mix them with other students who want to make a difference in their communities. We encourage a family feeling through fellowship and finish up the recipe with the leadership skills to do something with the personnel and desire to serve.

As in any recipe, the final product is far better when there is a wide variety to the ingredients. By mixing people with different experiences from different backgrounds, we bring in much broader perspectives ensuring the ideas and solutions are more creative.

I already know what I think. Only by interacting with people who have different ideas do I learn anything and that is certainly the goal for all of you in college. And, it should be the goal for all of us long after school is done. Knowledge is power and Alpha Phi Omega is all about sharing that power to make a difference wherever we can. The more resources we bring to the effort, the better the final product.

Too often, we focus on our differences – ethnicity, nationality, gender, religion or even field of study. But, we have much in common too. I truly believe that it is always possible to find some common ground regardless of how vast the differences may seem. In Alpha Phi Omega, it is laid out for us – Leadership, Friendship and Service – shared values to which we have all committed, whether just months ago or decades before.

It is easy to find other commonalities if we are only willing to look and the only foolproof way to find the common ground is through communication. In other words, just ask! Talk to people. Chat in grocery store lines and while waiting for the bus, smile at people in your classes and as you walk across town, compliment someone – find a way to break the ice.

It is very hard to stay in a room if no one in it looks like you. As a member of the majority, even if only within that room, you have the opportunity, and the obligation to reach out and greet the new person as he or she enters, before they get a chance to leave. Find something in common to focus on, to minimize the differences. It really is that easy; just reach out. Most of us found our way to Alpha Phi Omega because someone told us about the Fraternity and invited us to an event. Give others that same chance – pay it forward. Unlike our genetic families, we can invite people to join APO and to join staff. And, as you do, keep in mind how much richer the mix will be if the recipe includes a great variety of people from different backgrounds and perspectives.

My challenge to you is to be more aware of the diversity in your chapter, section and region – the Engineering student who feels adrift among all the English and Psychology majors, the conservative who feels surrounded by liberals, the non-traditional student who feels awkward among Brothers the age of his children. Define diversity broadly and be open to all the different people and perspectives you already have.

My second challenge to you is to create chapters, sections and regions with sufficient diversity that, regardless of who walks in the room, they see someone who will make them feel comfortable.

While not everyone understands, Alpha Phi Omega truly is a family, complete with the sister who annoys us and the uncle no one understands. Despite the dysfunctions, we are a family that loves each other, even on days we don't like each other too much.

Help spread the Leadership, Friendship and Service by ensuring Alpha Phi Omega has a place for everyone – even those crazy cousins no one likes to talk about.