Fraternities develop new life styles

By Alex Makowski

I. Introduction: Seventeen of MIT's fraternities have undergone major changes in their life styles over the past two or three years.

Shaking off the stereotyped role of a conservative social group, many have experimented with new concepts of communal living, and houses resist to break completely with past forms. Two forces have developed new ideas about what part the traditional "brotherhood" should play in their lives.

To investigate these new patterns, The Tech undertook an in-depth study of pledge training on the MIT campus. Much of the character of any fraternity depends on the way they orient their new members. Seventeen of MIT's twenty-nine fraternities were visited during the past year to learn the degree to which the concept of a fraternity was reflected in the house. They were then asked: do you orient the pledge with a sense of fellowship and responsibility to the house that will be meaningful and will significantly influence him, and, in trying to answer the question of whether the fraternity values the pledge in the same way that the members value themselves? And, to what extent do the pledges realize that they are being observed by the "old men"? These are some of the major considerations when making a new pledge policy.

II. Fraternity development: MIT's fraternities have undergone major changes in their life styles over the past two or three years. Shaking off the stereotyped role of a conservative social group, many have experimented with new concepts of communal living, and houses resist to break completely with past forms. Two forces have developed new ideas about what part the traditional "brotherhood" should play in their lives.

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III. Past policies: Three and four years ago, an overwhelming majority of the fraternities emphasized the traditional pledge-learning session, and, at several houses, were still subject to such mild forms of hazing as middle-of-the-night wakeups and extended calisthenics.

Much of this was supported on the grounds of practicality and tradition. Traditionalists argued that even freshmen, totally unaccustomed to group living, did not have the knowledge and experience needed to reach a responsible decision on many fraternity issues. Therefore, they should not be granted a vote. As for cleaning, these same fraternity men argued that it was the freshmen's responsibility to clean the house. In any event, they added, most of these freshmen would be assigned to rooms with upperclassmen and would, in any event, be supervised by the seniority system and the wide range of life styles available to the freshmen and upperclassmen interested in the fraternity.

IV. New policies: Thirteen of the seventeen houses that were surveyed allowed their freshmen a full vote at chapter meetings, while at one other the freshmen could participate in discussions at these meetings. A dozen fraternities divide the work of keeping the house clean among freshmen and upperclassmen. Although some of these twelve may weigh the decision a little more heavily in favor of the freshmen, all are committed to sharing the work among the whole fraternity.

Innovators claimed that these changes were in keeping with the changing student body. On the vote, they argue that it is unfair for freshmen to say anything in the all the decisions that affect them. As for cleaning house, they say that freshmen develop their sense of responsibility to the house that upclassmen feel will be meaningful and will significantly influence him, and, in trying to answer the question of whether the fraternity values the pledge in the same way that the members value themselves? And, to what extent do the pledges realize that they are being observed by the "old men"? These are some of the major considerations when making a new pledge policy.

V. The role of a conservative social group: MIT's fraternities, then, are no longer a "bunch of people running around" but rather as little formality about their personal lives as possible. In one house, for example, freshmen get a good start academically and socially.

VI. The more radical houses: The most radical houses, those with no structured pledge policy, are the ones that strive to make the house as much like "home" as possible. They have redefined a fraternity as a "bunch of people that live together as friends," with no attempt to force them into a certain kind of behavior. The result is a "brotherhood" that is very different from that of the old fraternity.

VII. Fraternity life: And between these two poles, of course, lie a dozen gradations. How do the houses who ad

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