

THE TRADITIONS OF A SORORITY

FOLKLIFE ARCHIVES
KENTUCKY BUILDING
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If you take a look around a college campus, you will notice that there are many different social organizations. There are business clubs, athletic clubs, and other school related clubs. Each of these different clubs could be called a folkgroup: they each have their own customs and traditions. Another social organization that may be considered as a folkgroup is a sorority. There are seven sororities on Western's campus. Each sorority has a different way of doing things. You cannot compare the traditions and customs of each sorority because you can only be a member of one, so looking at one sorority should give you an idea of how they fit into folklife.

Getting into a sorority is not an easy task! Your first introduction to sorority life; is when Fall Formal Rush begins. This takes place the first week before school starts in the fall. For almost one week you have to go to twenty minute parties to get to know each sorority better. At the end of the week is the big decision; "What sorority will I join?" This is traditionally called Bid-day. If you received the bid you wanted you then begin your pledgship. During this period there are many different activities. Certain activities are just for fun or they have a special meaning. The next four activities have special meaning. They express the closeness and the relationship between each member of the sorority.

In folklife the idea of expressive culture can be related to two ideas; 1) after you receive your bid, you get what is called a special friend. It is a custom for this person to give you her composite (picture), sunvisor, and any other special items. This person should help you get to know the others and help you understand more about the sorority; 2) after a month or so another tradition is to receive a big sister. Clues are left for one week, and you try to figure out who you think it is. When you find out, it has a very special meaning.

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There is a unique bond between you and your big sister, almost like the one in your real family (if you have a real sister). You and your big sister become very close throughout pledging and rest of the years in the sorority. She gives you the support you need, because at times pledging can become very rough.

During pledgeship it is a tradition to have a pledge-retreat. This takes place on one weekend that is convenient to every pledge. This is traditional because you discuss and make plans for a pledge-active dance. This is special because the pledges are planning it all for the actives. This dance has two customs, one is to give your big sister a paddle with your name and her name on it, and second is when the pledges cut the actives. The pledges go around snooping, asking questions, and listening very carefully for the perfect, most embarrassing story that other people do not know about. During a specific time at the dance pledges get up and announce the cuts in some certain way. The cuts are what everybody is waiting for. The dance always takes place two-three weeks after the second semester and one week before initiation. This is the most remembered dance because it takes so long to plan and it always leaves a lasting impression.

Once during the course of your pledgeship you will experience your first candlelight. This is a custom of the sorority, when a girl gets lavaliered, pinned, or engaged, someone holds a candle and she blows it out. This is special to the girls because no one knows, until that night, who the person is and everyone is able to share in the joy that she feels.

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The activities discussed above express the sentimental aspect of sorority life. These customs are the special feelings that bring the girls closer together. The next activities discussed are the fun aspects of sorority life.

Every year around the end of October and beginning of November are two activities that are big part of a sororities tradition. The first one is Sigma Nu Powderpuff football. This event has been held for the past nine years and is always coached by a Sigma Nu. This sport is participated in by each sorority. It lasts for three days. Each sorority plays one another and are eliminated by losing. Each sorority practices and psychs themselves up to win. After each game a traditional party is held for that nights winners. On the third night the championship game is played. You receive a trophy for winning, and after winning for three years in a row you get to keep the trophy. The championship party, along with the other parties, are always held at the Sigma Nu house.

This next activity is a little more on the serious side of fun. This activity is Chi-Omega's November Nonsense (held in November). Each fraternity and sorority have the option of whether or not to participate. This is more or less a talent show. The money raised, by selling tickets, is given to Chi-O's philanthropy. It has always been a tradition that during intermission the new pledge class put on a dance routine. At the end both the pledges and the actives do a dance or closing act. The closing symbolizes the closeness of the sorority.

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In the spring there is another activity. This activity is put on by the Sigma Chi's. This is called the Sigma Chi Derby. The Sigma Chi's have a custom, that during the course of a two week period they have a mixer with each sorority. Each sorority shows spirit and helps the Sigma Chi's collect for their philanthropy. At the end of the two week period is the Derby Darling contest, a beauty pageant, and the Derby. Each sorority has a candidate for the pageant and participates in the Derby games. At the end of the last day the Sigma Chi's tally up the points and award the sorority with the most points, a trophy. After that they give the winner the traditional party at the fraternity house.

The activities that were discussed above show the traditional aspects of what you think as common sorority life. Everyone thinks its all in fun, but it is really taken very seriously. Every tradition and custom expressed, has a very special meaning to each sorority, not just one. Some take it more serious, but it still means alot to each whether they winn or lose. The customs of each sorority may differ somewhat according to rules, but they will always be carried on and never forgotten.

These activities are considered folklore becaues they have been put on for a number of years and carry a very special meaning. Each sorority has a certain reason to carry on tradition, whether it be to raise money for their philanthropy or just to have fun, it will always be a tradition to carry on.