

Chapter 2: Planning for Success

Academic Goal Setting

"If you don't know where you are going, you'll probably end up somewhere else."

Individuals and organizations who are successful tend to have three traits in common: (1) They know where they are. (2) They know where they want to be. (3) they have a plan for getting there. The same principle holds true for academic goal setting. A good chapter regularly evaluates its performance, sets new goals, and develops strategies for attaining those goals. Likewise a good student utilizes the same process of evaluation, goal-setting, and action planning.

Goals should be specific and verifiable. The most common measuring stick for determining the level of academic performance is, of course, grade point averages -- which conveniently are specific and verifiable. Hence, a goal oriented chapter will establish a G.P.A. goal each semester, and each member will set his individual G.P.A. goal.

Individual Goal Setting

A chapter's grade point average is simply the mean of the averages attained by the members. Consequently, any attempt at academic goal setting by a fraternity/sorority must start with the individual members.

Goals should always be in writing; therefore, the first step in the process is to have each member complete an Academic Goal Setting Form, which should be distributed to all members by the second week of the semester, and turned into the Scholarship Committee by the third week of the semester. It is important to give the members a couple of weeks in order for them to finalize their class schedules and to get a feeling for the difficulty of their classes and the amount of work that will be required in order to receive the desired grade in each class. On the other hand, the goal sheets will lose their effectiveness if not completed early in the semester before the members develop their study patterns.

Each member should be asked to look at his/her grades the past semester, as well as his/her cumulative grade point average, and to decide if he/she is performing at his/her level of ability. If not attaining his/her potential, he/she should be asked to identify the factors that caused him/her to earn a grade point average less than the one he/she was capable of achieving.

Next, each member should set a grade goal for each class, and a G.P.A. goal for the semester. It is important to stress that the goal must be realistic and attainable, yet challenging. A 4.0 goal may be attainable for a person with a 3.3 cumulative grade point average but may not be realistic for someone with a 2.3 cumulative average. Normally, in order to be challenging, the semester goal should be higher than the person's cumulative average. The Academic Goal Setting Form also requires that each member determine the amount of study time needed per class in order to attain the desired grade and includes a pledge to avoid unexcused absences from class.

After completing the Academic Goal Setting Form, each member should fill out his Weekly Time Management Schedule goal sheet (which should be printed on the back of the form). Use of this schedule will help members identify the specific times during the week that they should set aside for studying.

The Scholarship Committee should collect the forms from all of the members. Committee members might be assigned to contact individuals not submitting their goal sheets by the deadline. The Scholarship Committee should meet individually with the pledges/new members, holdovers, and initiates not in good academic standing to personally review their academic goals with them. It is recommended that the goals set by each member be considered confidential; therefore, they should not be posted or otherwise publicly announced or displayed.

Goals should be reviewed regularly. For that reason, the Scholarship Committee should return to each member a photocopy of his goal sheet and time management schedule for him/her to put in a conspicuous place, such as a bulletin board above his/her desk or in the front of his/her notebook, where he can refer to them often. Each member should also be given a set of blank Weekly Time Management Schedules to complete at the beginning of each week. It is recommended that twice during the semester, Academic Goal Progress and Self-Evaluation and Planning Forms be distributed to all members to assist them in assessing their progress to date and to encourage them to utilize Weekly Time Management Schedules so that priority items are completed on time. The most appropriate times are one week before mid-terms and two weeks before final examinations. These forms do not need to be collected; however, the Scholarship Committee should meet individually with the pledges/new members, holdovers and initiates not in good academic standing to review their progress and assist them in developing study plans.

Goal achievement should be recognized and praised. At the end of each semester, the Scholarship Committee should determine which members were successful in attaining their academic grade point average goals. These members should be recognized in a visible way, such as posting a list on the Scholarship Bulletin Board, and should receive a tangible reward, such as a framed certificate or a t-shirt. Financial incentives are not recommended for this purpose, since some members may be tempted to set unchallenging goals in order to receive the monetary benefit.

Chapter Goal Setting

The first step in setting a chapter academic goal is determining a chapter grade point average target. Analyze the chapter's performance during the past couple of years to determine any trends, and identify the factor contributing to those trends. Look at the chapter's academic ranking on campus at the end of the last semester and determine where you realistically would like to rank at the end of the current semester and the approximate grade point average that would be required.

It is usually interesting to see what grade point average the chapter would attain if every member attained their academic goals. Just add up the individual G.P.A. goals and divide by the number of members. You should avoid, however, using the result as a chapter goal since it is very unlikely that all members will attain their goal. In fact, if that situation existed, it probably would indicate that the members did not establish goals that were challenging enough. In reality, many members will not attain their goals for a variety of reasons. Some will have underestimated the difficulty of their classes. Others will have failed to adhere to their study time and class attendance commitments. Some members may have encountered personal situations that have hindered their school work. Consequently, the average of the individual members' goals is unrealistic as a chapter goal. One way to set the chapter goal is to take the midway point between the mean of the individual members' goals and the chapter's actual grade point average from the previous semester.

As you can see, setting the chapter grade point average goal is a subjective process that involves many factors. Regardless of how it is derived, the goal should be put in writing, be officially adopted by the membership, and be posted on the Scholarship Bulletin Board. The individual members need to be reminded that the chapter's performance will be determined by the degree to which they attain their personal academic goals.

Goals should always be accompanied by action plans to indicate what steps need to be taken in order to reach the goal. The Scholarship Committee should prepare a written action plan, usually referred to as the Scholarship Program, to include a listing of all program components, a calendar showing when each activity will occur, and a budget. The action plan should indicate which person has been assigned each responsibility, and should include deadlines. The Scholarship Program should be approved by the membership at a chapter meeting, and a copy of the program should be distributed to all members, including pledges/new members, with an additional copy posted on the Scholarship Bulletin Board. The program should be reviewed and revised at the end of each semester, after the chapter's grade point average has been determined.