

Five things I learned by being Greek at IIT

Miriam Schmid

B.S. BIOCHEMISTRY / MATH AND SCIENCE
EDUCATION '14

When I arrived at IIT, my 18-year old self was offered a bid to join the Greek community. More than five years later, my 23-year old self wishes I could thank that overwhelmed but excited young girl for making a decision that has shaped every day of my future since then. She thought she was finding some women who would be her friends during college, but had no idea she would find and learn so much more. I would like to share five life lessons that I learned as a member of the Greek community.

Choosing the people you surround yourself with will shape your future.

While many people do not realize the importance of the people they surround themselves with until much later in life, this lesson is very real for the Greeks. Each year, in order to make sure our chapter survives and thrives in the future we must meet, recruit, and bid new members. Contrary to popular belief, Greeks do not bid as many people as possible in order to collect dues or have a large chapter; instead, we need to find women (or men) who share our beliefs, will be dedicated, and to whom we can entrust the future of our chapter. As I became a senior and super-senior, this became more real; I was leaving and needed to find amazing women who could care for the chapter and make it better.

This ability to find and recruit people of similar values and dedication proves an invaluable skill later in life. This not only applies for finding a good significant other and friends, but also in the workplace. Greeks make great recruiters and interviewers because we have spent years talking to new people, starting specific conversations and asking the right questions to learn about a person's values, and getting a feel for when people are being real and when they are putting on a front. As I meet coworkers, I can very quickly determine what values we share and how committed they are because I have practiced recruiting, and when I am in a position to hire new people to trust with my company or organization, I already have years of experience on reading people and finding talent and leadership they may not even recognize yet.

Stepping out of your comfort zone is the only way to grow.

According to the current President of ASA, Nicolette Lewis, "Part of stepping out of your comfort zone is being surrounded by

people who you know will support you no matter what. You can never get that in the residence halls because you do not choose to be with those people and you do not necessarily share the same values." Greek chapters provide this support when members step up and hold their first leadership position, join a new athletic team, run a marathon, start a new job, etc. We not only support each other as we step out of our comfort zones, we challenge each other to do so. Several years ago, ASA hosted a yoga event for our physical aim. I was so uncomfortable doing yoga, but all of my sisters were there and we made fools of ourselves as we tried to do yoga. Even though I was way out of my comfort zone and could in no way do a "downward dog", I loved how I felt afterwards and immediately bought myself a yoga workout video. In any other setting, I would not have attempted yoga because I didn't think I would enjoy it and I would make a fool of myself, but because my sisters were doing it with me, I would have tried almost anything.

Accountability is key to being successful.

When you commit to being in a Greek chapter, you also agree to live up to the agreed-upon standards and be held accountable when you do not. While standards reflect your treatment of others, violation of house standing rules, and academics, I would like to focus on academic accountability.

The role of the scholarship chair is to provide encouragement, accountability, and resources to members who are struggling. Because the relationships in a fraternity or sorority are life-long dedication to one another, members are more receptive to this help and accountability than they would be otherwise. RAs at IIT have for many years done "early-warning" check-ins to students who are missing excessive classes or failing—basically, the same function that the scholarship chair serves. However, the scholarship system in Greek chapters is everything that RGL hopes that the RAs or RHDs could provide in terms of academic support. Unfortunately, they will never have the effectiveness that a family of brothers and sisters can have. At a Bible study at ASA last year (yes, we have those in many chapters), over half of our group agreed that they would have left IIT for academic reasons had they not had a sisterhood like ASA. The fact is that Greek life increases the probability of retaining our members more than IIT could ever do. If our organizations did not exist, many students would not find a place to belong or people to provide academic accountability

and support.

A title is nice, but true leadership is about people looking up to and following you.

One of my favorite times of year as an ASA was always the beginning of November—chapter elections. This was the time of year when members think about what impact they want to have and what positions they could run for. As an upperclassman, I loved talking to younger members and challenging them to step up, embrace their strengths, and increase their confidence to lead and serve our chapter. However, I also enjoyed the week after the elections because I could reach out to members who had not been elected. What I could share with them is that being a leader is not about actually having a title; it's about serving others and having others look up to you. As a new member, my goal was to be President of ASA. However, I had the opportunity to be an RA, and I needed the financial stability this would bring. Because I was not living in the house, I never did get to serve on the executive board. However, I found other ways to serve, and I always felt like a leader in the house even though I only held positions of Parliamentarian and Sports Chair.

Greek leadership is seen throughout campus in nearly EVERY organization. There is a reason why the Leadership Academy has always been around 50 percent Greek even though only 10 to 15 percent of the undergraduate population is Greek. We attract those who are leaders or would like to become leaders, and we give people the opportunity and support to grow into the leader they may not even have known they could be.

What other people think of you doesn't matter; what your family does can change your life.

Each year during recruitment, there is at least one young woman who we meet who we decide that not only does she need the social aspect of our chapter, but we recognize her potential to grow into a strong leader if she has a group of women who believe in her. Many times during recruitment meetings, we'll say, "I loved meeting so-and so. She had so many qualities that I think are going to make her a great VP Recruitment or Sunshine Chair or Scholarship Chair." Before these members even join our chapter we see the potential in them to become something more than they see in themselves. While others may have told them they cannot, we know that with our support, they can, because all of us were once that young man or woman who just needed some-

one to believe in us.

So what does all of this mean? There are mountains of evidence on the benefits of Greek Life on an undergraduate education. Retention and graduation rates are higher; job placement increases because of networking; connection to your alma mater increases; and success in a future career is increased immensely. Other efforts to do this like the RAs in the residence halls can only attempt to do half the job that the Greek system can do. Your RA will not follow you for four years and continuously challenge you to grow; your Greek family will.

Because of this, I have been, and continue to be baffled why much of the administration, especially the Dean of Students and Provost, continue to pursue agendas that adversely affect our Greek community, which is continuously recognized as one of the best in the country, instead of supporting us. Chapters are struggling to keep chapter houses full because freshmen are no longer allowed to move in, and the sororities are trying to negotiate housing contracts that are going to make it difficult for our chapters to survive. Administrators are quick to jump to conclusions when something goes wrong because "what else could you expect from the Greeks?" instead of helping us learn from those mistakes and helping us grow. When one person makes a mistake in one of our chapters, it reflects on all of us; when a non-Greek student makes a mistake it only reflects on them. We put on hundreds of philanthropy, sports, leadership, intellectual, and social events a year, but administrators only focus on the one or two where something goes wrong. I challenge the Greek community to be continually better socially, academically, and in leadership. Greeks should be held to a higher standard because we strive to be just that, but we need administrators to understand that we will still make mistakes because we are still young adults trying to find out who we are and who we can be.

When the Greek community sees support from the school, IIT will see the full impact of what this community can be to the retention, student leadership, and reputation of the school. We are vocal about the chapters we love because they have shaped us and continue to support us. The question now becomes: What could IIT be if all Greeks were vocal about how much IIT has supported our community in our efforts to shape men and women of leadership, courage, siblinghood, philanthropy, and academics?

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TechNews
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