

New Interfraternity Council policy draws mixed reactions

Friday, December 2, 2011 | 1:12 p.m. CST

BY [RAYMOND HOWZE](#)

COLUMBIA — Doubt and cautious optimism are emerging as reactions to a new policy that allows alcohol in MU fraternity houses.

"I think it's going to be very important to the Greek system to police themselves in order for it (the new policy) to work," said Columbia Police Sgt. Jill Schlude. "How do you allow a small percentage of people who live in a fraternity to have access to alcohol and expect that it is going to be restricted to just that segment?"

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The policy, approved in November by the Interfraternity Council, [will allow fraternity members to drink alcohol](#) on their house premises as long as they are at least 21 years old. It takes effect August 2012, and participation is optional.

Right now, all fraternity houses are supposed to be alcohol-free. If they choose to embrace the

policy and have alcohol, they must have it approved by their overseeing housing corps and alumni board. They also will have go through an accreditation process with the Office of Greek Life at MU. Otherwise, the fraternity must remain dry.

One of the houses that will stay alcohol-free is Alpha Gamma Sigma, which has been

at MU since 1923.

"I don't see any way in the world it (the policy) can be successful," said Larry Schuster, an alumni adviser for Alpha Gamma Sigma. "If you've got a roommate that's 20 and sitting there watching the Tigers play basketball, what's the likelihood that you'll say, 'Sure, go ahead and help yourself?'"

Schuster has been involved with the alumni consortium of MU for three years. The alumni consortium is a group of fraternity alumni advisers who collaborate to discuss issues all the fraternities deal with, including alcohol enforcement.

"It's not really a realistic situation," he said. "I think the mistake we're making is not whether it's right or not right to have drinking in fraternities; it's how we manage alcohol consumption — and right now as a university community, we're terrible at it."

The Interfraternity Council oversees 28 social fraternities at MU. Of these, 24 have houses recognized by the council, which means they are subject to council rules about houses. The other four fraternities don't have houses recognized by the council. All social fraternities are on private property, even if they are adjacent to MU.

Under those rules, reports about the use of alcohol in the 24 fraternity houses can come from anyone — parent, visitor, police officer — and go to the Office of Greek Life and the Interfraternity Council. Sanctions can be imposed on chapters if the Interfraternity Council finds the report valid.

The hope is that under the new policy, the use of alcohol can be better monitored, said Janna Basler, assistant director of Greek Life and Leadership.

For houses that pass the accreditation process, random checks, or audits, will be carried out a possible two to three times a month by a third-party security firm. The audits will be funded through Interfraternity Council dues paid by the houses.

Enforcement won't change for the Columbia Police Department. Officers only enter a fraternity house with consent or if they think someone is in danger. If there is a large party going on, nuisance party ordinances apply, but the police will not enter without permission, Schlude said. The police then file a report with the Office of Greek Life or return to the house and issue citations at a later date.

Schlude said the department has had a "considerable number" of calls to check out fraternity houses this year. These have included calls for medical issues related to over-consumption, complaints about sexual assault, out-of-control parties and property damage, Schlude said.

"If that's the trend of things under the dry policy, it doesn't bode well for the new policy," Schlude said.

Still, she is "cautiously optimistic" about it.

Stephen Glynias, president of Beta Theta Pi, said the house will look into whether the fraternity wants to embrace the new policy.

Glynias said older members might consider staying in the house instead of moving out. With the current policy, members 21 and older can be inclined to move out because they are not allowed to have alcohol in the house. In addition, Glynias said, houses would be monitored and there wouldn't be "huge violations going unnoticed."

Pi Kappa Phi's president, Andrew Schutte, also sees the new policy as way to better

monitor alcohol use in the houses.

"This is a first step to have a hand in alcohol at fraternity houses," Schutte said.

There is precedent. In 1998, the Interfraternity Council drafted a policy to ban alcohol from fraternity houses. The draft was amended before it passed in April of 2000 to allow members 21 and older to have alcohol as long as pledges did not live in the house. If the house wanted to have live-in pledge classes, alcohol would be banned completely.

That policy lasted until August 2003, when the council banned alcohol and made MU's Greek system one of the largest in the nation to have an alcohol-free policy, according to a 2003 Missourian report.

The first move to change this came last spring, when the Office of Greek Life created a [strategic plan](#) to assess the Greek system. Alcohol abuse and risk management were examined as [part of that review](#).

Topics of concern regarding alcohol were lawlessness, fear of a tragedy occurring, sexual assault, destruction of property and hazing.

Given the importance of the policy change, the Office of Greek Life will reassess the new policy over the next year and again after it is implemented in August. Basler said adjustments will be made to the policy as they are needed.

As they look down the road toward next August, the Office of Greek Life and the Interfraternity Council have to determine which houses will participate, who will be the third-party security firm and what will result from the audits carried out by the security firm.

Schlude said the policy has the possibility to work.

"But if it becomes a smoke screen to get alcohol into houses, it's not going to work," she said. "It's not going to take very long for it to become very apparent it's not working."

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