

# EARLY WARNING SIGNALS

## ALPHA SIGMA PHI FRATERNITY

### GENERAL EARLY WARNING SIGNALS

- A. Lack of Strong Leadership** – Elections are run as popularity contests. Officers are elected because they look like leaders but really have no ambition to lead. Once in office, these officers attempt to keep everyone happy and not “rock the boat.” An early warning signal for ineffective leadership training in the chapter is uncontested elections and lack of upper class officers.
- B. Lack of Discipline** – Early warning signals include lengthy chapter meetings, constant disciplinary problems with the university or community that remain unresolved at the chapter level, and extensive physical damage to the chapter house. All of these are costly to the reputation and strength of Alpha Sigma Phi. Growing intolerance of fraternity mischief has made this the Number One area for loss of Alpha Sigma Phi chapters.
- C. Breakdown in Communications** – Do the chapter officers command the respect of the chapter? Are they trusted to make decisions or are all decisions brought before the chapter for vote? Do Brothers and pledges enjoy a good conversation or are they exclusive? How often is the Grand Chapter Advisor contacted and informed of chapter activities? All of these are early warning signals of a breakdown in communications, which may result in a breakdown in credibility, trust, morale, and unity throughout the chapter.
- D. Rationalization** – How many times have you heard the chapter say, “We’re unique!” Does the chapter readily excuse their lack of success in recruitment by claiming that they sought quality rather than quantity? Are they blaming the university, other fraternities, or a poorly maintained chapter house for their failures? If so, it is time the chapter stands up to the real problems and faces them as men!
- E. Apathy** – Most chapters will identify this as their major problem. A few Brothers do all the work. Apathy is not a problem, but rather a symptom of a problem (i.e. a poor and misdirected pledge program, lack of member pride in self-worth to the chapter, ineffective chapter leadership). It usually takes an “outsider” to point out these real problems to the chapter and help in resolving them.
- F. Arrogance and Autonomy** – This is usually the opposite of apathy. The chapter prides themselves in their autonomy from the university, the fraternity, other fraternities, sometimes their alumni, and even their Grand Chapter Advisor. A fine line exists between pride and arrogance when a chapter is convinced of its own perfection. Recognizing that even in the best chapters problems are recurrent, the chapter’s self-imposed autonomy will preclude the assistance from others in a position to help when such assistance is needed.

### SPECIFIC EARLY WARNING SIGNALS

- A. High Accounts Receivables** – This typically reflects weak chapter leadership and a poor understanding of the financial operations of the chapter. The result is typically massive year-end financial shortages or a lack of social activities, closing the kitchen, individual assessments, deferring pledge and initiation fees, etc., which serve only to prolong the problem and destroys chapter morale.
- B. Irregular Use of the Ritual** – Experience has proven that the strongest chapters of Alpha Sigma Phi over the long run are those who practice the ritual regularly. Without elaborating on why this is so, let us acknowledge this fact as a lesson for chapter strength. The lessons of the ritual are only meaningful to those who understand and practice them.
- C. Recruitment Reporting** – The Grand Chapter Advisor should insure that all pledges and initiates are reported to headquarters promptly and their fees paid. The usual tendency is to spend any money remaining in the checking account of the chapter. Misappropriation of these fees will cause prolonged problems for the chapter which could span the course of several years, and thus decreasing the chapter’s recruitment opportunities, social opportunities, relations with alumni who are blamed for the problem, etc.
- D. Poor Record Keeping** – The chapter has lost track of all manuals, report forms, previous correspondence, etc.

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Officer Notebooks are not maintained. Financial records have been misplaced or do not exist. The chapter has no record of previous pledges or initiates. Poor record keeping, financial and otherwise, precludes a successful officer transition. If your chapter is constantly complaining that they do not have the necessary report forms or you hear the officers say “I didn’t know I had to do that,” the chapter may need your help in organizing a proper record keeping system and/or assistance in filling out the various report forms.

- E. House Maintenance and Occupancy** – These two warning signals typically go hand in hand. Poor maintenance will lead to low house occupancy. Is the chapter having a hard time filling the chapter house? Do they have a large out-of-house membership? Does the condition of their chapter house reflect pride in themselves? If not, let’s find out why.
- F. Poor Alumni Relations** – Does the chapter blame all their problems on the alumni? Is money all they want from alumni? If so, this is probably a case of rationalization. What is the chapter doing to cultivate alumni support? Unless attitudes toward alumni change, the alumni will not be there when they are really needed.
- G. Social Activities** – Do the social activities of the chapter show some “class?” Are they creative or do they revolve only around a keg? What do the Brothers and pledges discuss in their spare time or at dinner? We can learn much about the quality of each chapter by listening closely to the topics they discuss in their spare time.
- H. Pledge Retention** – A poor pledge retention rate (usually less than 75%) is a good indication of an improper recruitment and pledge education program. It is also an early warning signal of perhaps a deeper problem such as poor chapter morale or a poor fraternity experience available upon initiation.
- I. Scholarship** – This should be the number one priority for each individual student, but is often one of the lowest priorities in the chapter. Future trends predict that scholastic excellence will be a major characteristic of all successful fraternity chapters. Does the chapter provide a suitable atmosphere for studying? Is there a written scholarship program? Would you invest your son’s future in this the type of environment?
- J. Campus and Community Relations** – Ask around campus and the community to see what others think of the Alpha Sigma Phi chapter. What do the girls on campus think of the men in Alpha Sigma Phi? How would they rate Alpha Sigma Phi among other fraternities? How do other fraternity men view Alpha Sigma Phi? Do the neighbors enjoy the presence of Alpha Sigma Phi in their community? Why or why not? The answers to these questions can alert us to problems that we may be too close to see otherwise.

These are only a few of the most common early warning signals. Other early warning signals will immediately come to your mind based on your experience in Alpha Sigma Phi.

