

Despite Trend, Frats Slide & Close On Some Campuses

By Susan Skorupa and Chuck Sade

MINOT, ND (CPS)—While most fraternities and sororities around the country are of full to capacity, the boom seems to be going bust on some campuses.

Some observers predict the still-isolated greek failures are a precursor to a nationwide downturn or leveling off of greek activity, pointing to changing student attitudes and financial aid woes as evidence.

But others say it's wrong to read much into the failures, and that the affected campuses simply haven't caught on to the growth trend yet.

At Minot State College, for example, Nu Sigma Tau closed down "for financial reasons," leaving just one frat and three sororities—with a total membership of 45 students—left on the campus.

MSC used to host three frats and four sororities.

"In my years here, I've seen membership as high as 80 in one group," recalls Garnet Cox, MSC's dean of students.

A number of other colleges—several branches of the University of Minnesota and Penn State, among others—also are seeing their greek population dwindle somewhat.

"Greek participation is down except for two houses," Cox reports. "In the past two years membership has been very low, and it's been edging down for the past five to six years."

"Everywhere else, frats and sororities are gaining members," laments Tim Ross of Sigma Tau Gamma, MSC's remaining fraternity. "We're rushing for the first three or four weeks of the quarter, but the attitude is so poor on campus."

Ross blames the decline on "a change in attitude from Greek life," and what students perceive as the high financial cost of joining up.

"It's a strong system," adds Mike Fries of Psi Upsilon at Wesleyan University, "but the composition of the school is changing. There's less interest in greks."

Wesleyan greek membership declined in 1982, but has rebounded since houses began stretching out rush periods.

Nebraska greks also prolonged the rush period and changed eligibility rules to reverse a membership decline several years ago, reports Rachel Jensen of the Interfraternity Council in Lincoln.

Membership at Alabama, Cornell and Penn State slid this year, but Dan Daughtery of Penn State's Pi Kappa Psi says yearly membership is "a give and take. We were up last year more than we're down this year."

At the University of Minnesota—Minneapolis, however, some houses report membership drops of as much as 15 percent. Seven to ten houses have closed in the last four years.

UM's large commuter population accounts for some of the decline, says Alpha Tau Omega member Pat Teage, "but there's just a lack of interest."

While more than 80 percent of UM's 42,000 students live off campus, the college currently houses 27 greek groups.

"The idea of legacy, recruiting (alumni) children, grandchildren, cousins, hasn't worked well lately, though we're starting to push that again," Beta Theta Pi member Guy Purvis explains. "And the reputations don't mean as much. Perhaps the kids in high school just aren't interested in greek life."

"The national cycle for greks is down all over," MSC's Cox claims. "The interest is not there with incoming students."

"It's not the start of a trend," argues Bob Marchesani, assistant executive director of the National Interfraternity Conference (NIC) in Indianapolis, Ind. "It strikes me as very odd. It flies in the face of anything we see nationally."

"They're dealing with very small numbers," contends William Gurowitz, Cornell's student affairs spokesman. "Minnesota is a high commuter campus in an urban area, and at Minot, with only a few greek groups, any incidence of thought that frats aren't the place to be makes for a drop in membership."

Indeed, a recent study concludes 1984 fraternity membership topped 250,000, up from about 150,000 in the Vietnam War era when greek popularity fell on many campuses. In 1965, membership was 188,000.

Sorority membership has increased by six percent every two years since the early seventies.

"The trend toward increasing membership began on the east and west coasts," says Sociology Professor Jack Levin of Northeastern University, author of the 1984 national greek census study.

"It doesn't surprise me it hasn't

spread there (MSC and UM)," he adds. "I predict the Midwest will experience a big spurt in the next five years."

"Some places lag behind the coasts," Levin continues. "It's a regional lag, but it's also probably lack of interest and money. Five years from now, I bet you'll see the trend reverse there (MSC and UM)."

"The situation at Minot is not a trend," the NIC's Marchesani agrees. "At least not in the next five years because greks today are marketing themselves in a more attractive way."

In deed, "fraternities and sororities are going to have to pay attention to the student of the eighties," says Mary Rouse, University of Wisconsin assistant dean of students.

"There's more academic pressure, so greks with a heavier academic emphasis will fare better than those that remain with traditions like hazing," she predicts.

"Greks need to update and revise to appeal to a different type of student," MSC's Cox agrees. "I don't anticipate a return to earlier membership levels at Minot, but I do anticipate a return to a healthy level."

Apathy, Desegregation Push Some Colleges To The Brink This Spring

By David Gaede

(CPS)—"It's clear things aren't working out for black colleges," understates Keith Jennings, who monitors black student issues for the United States Students Association (USSA) in Washington, D.C.

Indeed, the black colleges — choked by a withering money base, federal aid cuts, muddled communications, black student apathy and desegregation efforts that are pushing black students into historically-white campuses — are having their worst season in years.

Enrollments at black colleges, after increasing steadily for the past 25 years, have dropped five percent in just the last year.

And amid cries of racism and even bureaucratic "genocide," black education leaders apparently aren't sure what to do about it.

It's serious enough, moreover, that inside observers are labeling it "the quiet death of black colleges," Jennings reports.

Some colleges aren't going quietly:

Cheyney University in Pennsylvania, for instance, recently lost its accreditation by the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools because it laced "coherent and purposeful direction, mission, and leader-

ship."

President C.T. Enus Wright resigned the next week, and soon after that two administrative vice presidents were fined.

"It's nothing more than cultural genocide to get rid of and destroy black colleges," claims former Cheyney student government leader Cynthia Jefferson.

Most of the reasons for the accreditation denial "could be applied to any college if you looked hard enough," Jefferson claims, adding President Wright was merely a "sacrificial lamb" to appease the accrediting association.

Historically-black Knoxville University in Tennessee and Lincoln College in Nebraska also have lost accreditation this year on similar grounds, Jennings notes.

Three financially-strapped black Texas colleges — Wiley, Huston-Tillotson and Texas College — may merge to pool their resources and enrollments.

Tennessee State University, meanwhile, is under pressure to integrate its predominantly-black student body and have a 50 percent white enrollment by 1992.

The crises follow last year's financial failure of 119-year-old Fisk University, long regarded as the flagship of black colleges.

"Black colleges are facing a

problem which has two contradictory ends," laments Samuel Myers, president of the National Association for Equal Opportunity in Higher Education (NAFEO).

Myers says that while black students need black colleges more than ever now, there's a "new threat to black schools that their funding, enrollment, and support will decline. The image of black schools is hurt by problems at some black institutions, which adds to the problem even more."

Only 20 percent of all black students attend predominantly-black colleges, but nearly half of all black students who complete their degrees do so at a black school.

"Students in black colleges seem to have a virtual corner on intellectual satisfactions and outcomes during the college years," chiefly because of the sense of belonging, support and understanding they receive, claims psychologist Jacqueline Fleming, author of the newly-released book "Blacks in College."

On white campuses, black students often "fall prey to the feelings of alienation and estrangement, and are less likely to develop motivating relationships with faculty or to feel a part of campus life."

More black students head for

predominantly-white campuses anyway.

"Ironically," points out Harriott Schimel, spokeswoman for the United Negro College Fund, "the traditional information systems among blacks for passing along the advantages of black schools—parents, teachers, and ministers who were themselves educated at black schools—have become more diffused, so many blacks go off to white colleges not knowing the value they could get from a black college."

Many of today's black students seem more interested in assimilating faster into white society, some sources add.

Even on historically-white campuses, enrollment in black studies courses and membership in campus black student unions have plummeted in recent years.

And the nation's only national black student lobby group—the National Organization of Black University and College Students—has locked the doors of its Washington offices and all but ceased operating because of "disinterest in internal conflicts," sources report.

Many black colleges today are run by administrators who graduated from white, not black, schools, "and are completely unfamiliar with the history and

purpose of black institutions," Jennings says.

And as blacks themselves forsake black colleges, the politicians who finance them now question the need for them.

"The Brown decision (the landmark court case which forced integration of public schools) is being reinterpreted in an upside-down manner now, in effect saying that we should close black schools so those students can go to white schools," says Jennings.

In response to all the problems, NAFEO is planning a nationwide marketing strategy for black colleges.

Pepsi Cola officials, in fact, have volunteered "to help us identify the strength of our product and market it the same way you would market anything else these days," says Myers.

"We can't sit back in the black colleges and go on the assumption that we're needed," he explains. "What we need is a very sophisticated marketing strategy."

But "the problem just isn't getting enough attention," Jennings counsels. "People aren't sure what to do: should we fight or should we accept what seems to be our fate in society? The thing is, as long as have this 'keep it in the family' attitude, nothing will change."