

Greek Life Dictionary

Active: A fully initiated member of a fraternity/sorority.

Alumna: A member of a women's fraternal organization who is no longer an undergraduate.

Plural: Alumnae.

Alumnus: A member of a men's fraternal organization who is no longer an undergraduate.

Plural: Alumni.

Alum: A gender-neutral term for members of men's or women's fraternal organizations who are no longer undergraduates.

Badge: A "pin" worn by fully initiated members of each fraternity or sorority that carries its official insignia.

Bid: An invitation to join a sorority or fraternity.

Big: Short for "big brother/sister," a mentor assigned to a new member. Many organizations have special names for these pairings.

Brother: An active or alumni member of a fraternity.

Brotherhood: The common term for the bond between members of the same fraternity.

Chapter: An established membership unit of a local, national or international sorority or fraternity.

Class or New Member Class: A term used to name new members of a Greek Letter organization who all joined during the same semester. Formerly known as "Pledge Class."

Crest: Insignia used by sorority and fraternity members. Most Greek organizations reserve the crest for initiated members only. Each crest has hidden, secret meanings behind it. Also known as a coat of arms, shield or armorial bearings.

Dues: The monetary costs of membership in a fraternity or sorority. These fees are used to cover the costs of operation, formal events, social activities, and other events, depending on the organization.

Founder's Day: An event celebrated by fraternities and sororities to highlight the founding of their organization and celebrate its history.

Fraternity: The name applied to Greek organizations including both men's and women's organizations.

Founders: The founding members of a Greek Letter organization.

Governing Council: Also known as an umbrella council, generally supports and acts as a voice for organizations within it, including being the official sponsored student organization as liaison between the university and the members of the member organizations.

Greeks: Members of a fraternity or sorority. The term “Greek” is used because a majority of fraternities and sororities use Greek letters to distinguish themselves.

Hand Signs: Signs that only a member of an organization can “throw up.” Most signs have a deep meaning to an organization or ritualistic symbol.

Hazing: Any willful act or practice by a member, directed against a member or new member, which, with or without intent, is likely to: cause bodily harm or danger, offensive punishment, or disturbing pain, compromise the person’s dignity; cause embarrassment or shame in public; cause the person to be the object of malicious amusement or ridicule; cause psychological harm or substantial emotional strain; and impair academic efforts. In addition, hazing is any requirement by a member which compels a member or new member to participate in any activity which is illegal, is contrary to moral or religious beliefs, or is contrary to the rules and regulations of the fraternity, institution of learning, and civil authorities.

Honorary: A member of a Greek organization who is “honored” to hold/wear the organizations letters though they did not undergo the traditional initiation process.

Inactive: An inactive member of a Greek organization. Reasons a member may be inactive include but are not limited to, a current member’s GPA falling below honorable standing (2.0), failure to pay dues, failure to complete service hours, as a disciplinary measure, etc.

Initiation: A ceremony during which new members receive lifelong membership privileges into the organization they have chosen to be a part of.

Lavalier: A necklace with Greek letters attached to it. Sorority members usually receive their sorority’s lavalier at the time of joining or after initiation.

Legacy: Each organization has its own definition of a “legacy.” It is generally defined as an immediate family member of an initiated member, such as a sister/brother or daughter/son.

Letters: The first Greek letter of each Greek word that makes up the motto of a particular fraternity or sorority; these are generally displayed on clothing and other Greek paraphernalia.

Line/Lineage: A descending/ascending tradition of big brothers/sisters and little brothers/sisters that connect alumni with current members within a specific Greek organization.

Little: Short for “Little brother/sister” - a new member who is being mentored by an older member of their organization.

Local Chapter: A Greek organization that is not affiliated with a national organization.

New Member: A person who has accepted a bid but is not yet initiated to a sorority or fraternity.

New Member Educator: The liaison between the new members and the chapter, they are responsible for implementing and monitoring the new member program and preparing the new members for initiation.

New Member Program: The time period where the new member learns about their new sorority and fraternity before initiation. This time frame lasts from Bid day until Initiation. Formerly called pledge period (and still called this in some fraternities and sororities).

Officers: Initiated members who currently hold positions within their Greek organization or governing body.

Philanthropy: This is a community service project/s held by a fraternity, sorority, or both.

Pledge: A person who has accepted a bid but is not yet initiated to a sorority or fraternity. This term is believed to be outdated by some and can be offensive. There is variation in the term used from Greek org to Greek org. See also “New Member”

Potential New Member: A person who is interested in joining a Greek-letter organization, and will participate in rush, intake, or recruitment; often shortened to “PNM”.

Recruitment: The process through which sororities and fraternities get new members. Potential New Members tour each house, are invited to different events and/or choose the new members for their organization (students seeking membership in a fraternity or sorority “rush,” while the Greek organizations “recruit” new members).

Ritual: The traditional rites and ceremonies of a fraternity or sorority; these are almost always private and known only to initiated members of a fraternal organization.

Rush: The process of attending recruitment events held by chapters with the intent of meeting people and participating in a particular fraternity or sorority (students seeking membership in a fraternity or sorority “rush,” while the Greek organizations “recruit” new members).

Sister: An active member of a sorority.

Sisterhood: The common term for the bond between members of the same sorority.

Surrogate: A member of your Greek organization who stands in as your big, but who is not a member of your line. Often shortened to “s’big.” See also “Line/Lineage.”