

FRATERNITIES AND SCHOLARSHIPS AT  
THE UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS

For the past five years the office of the Dean of Men of the University of Illinois has been keeping records of the scholarship averages of the chapters of national social fraternities represented in the university. For the first two years these averages were not published. In 1912 the figures were given to the *Alumni Quarterly* with the idea that their publication might be of interest to fraternity alumni. Immediately the active members of the fraternities became interested in the scholarship ranking, and the next report was published in the *Daily Illini*. Now the semi-annual publication of the averages is awaited with no little impatience by the fraternities; in fact, from the time of the semester examinations to the publication of the report, the office of the dean of men is crowded with inquiries concerning the progress of the report.

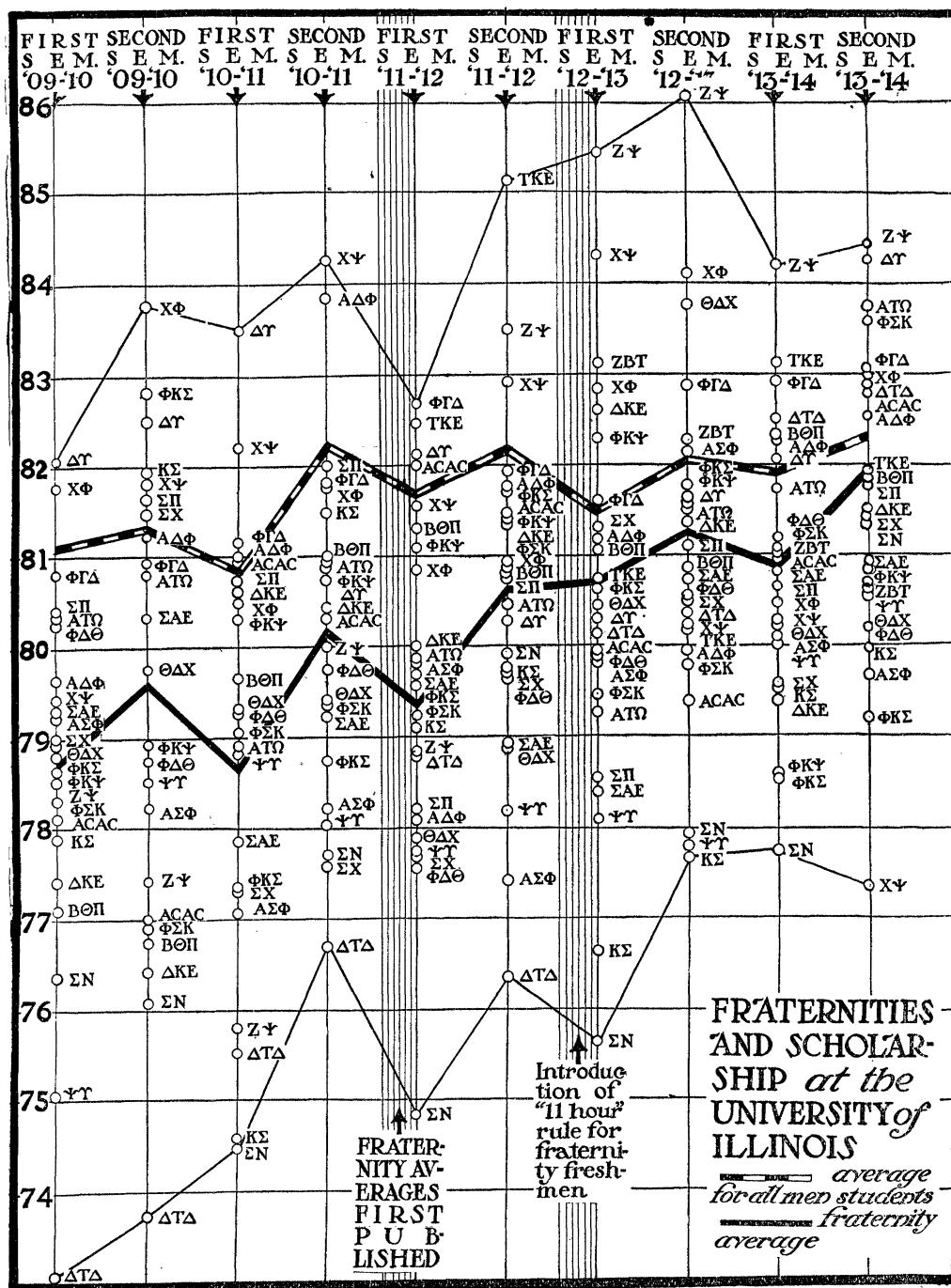
The accompanying graph has been prepared from the scholarship averages in the university for the ten semesters beginning with the first semester of 1909-1910. It shows specifically a comparison of the general fraternity average with the general university average for men; the effect upon the fraternity average of the publication of scholarship rankings and of the university regulation which provides that freshmen must obtain eleven hours of university credit before they may be initiated into a fraternity; and a study of the ups and downs of the averages of certain chapters. The graph is based upon the averages of 700 fraternity men and 2,600 fraternity and non-fraternity men.

A glance at the graph will show that in the ten semesters the fraternity average has gained upon the general university average for men, although it is still a little below it. Also, in 1909 the chapters were widely scattered up and down the scale, and in 1914 they are closely grouped around the fraternity average. This fact means undoubtedly that during the interval between these years the fraternities have intensified their attention to scholarship; the various chapters are so much alike generally that when they all enter upon the same purpose they are likely to end up closely grouped.

At two points the fraternity average jumps up quite suddenly. One point is the second semester after the introduction of the practise of publishing the averages, and the other is the semester in which was introduced the regulation controlling the initiation of freshmen. The experience of the office of dean of men, as well as the graph, records that with the publication of the averages for the first time there came a quite sudden awakening of the fraternities to scholarship matters. The office at that time was forced to provide a special system for satisfying the demands of fraternity officers for periodical reports on the progress of the members.

The reasons why the fraternities reacted so strongly to this stimulus for higher averages are various. The chapters at the bottom have undoubtedly been literally shamed into trying to raise their rating. A member of one of the chapters near the bottom when the first report was published said to me, "For years we have listened to lectures on scholarship from national officers and alumni, but nothing ever waked us up like that report. Why, everywhere we went we were 'kidded' and laughed at until, at last, in sheer desperation we took to studying." The fraternities near the top have been spurred on, undoubtedly, by the very natural desire to be first. But the great majority of the chapters are in little danger of being last and in only a small probability of being first. These middle-rank chapters, however, show fully as much concern over holding their position or improving it as do the chapters at the top and the bottom.

The reasonable explanation is, I think, that the acknowledged rivalry which has long existed in certain groups of fraternities has come to include scholarship. The fraternities may not have welcomed scholarship as a standard of comparison, but since the condition has been forced on them they are making the most of it. A member of one chapter said to me recently, "As soon as these averages are published the so-and-so chapter send in to their national officers both their average and ours." These two fraternities are strong rivals nationally. Another man said, in speaking of a freshman rushee from a small town,



"He didn't know a thing about national standing, but he knew exactly the scholastic reputation of every bunch which he was considering." I do not suppose that good or bad scholarship in the abstract, unless it is very good or bad, enters largely into the reputation of a chapter, but the fact that in the only definite scheme of ranking we have this or that chapter ranks high or low is taken as a presumption of its general merit.

A rather interesting commentary on the prevailing attitude toward low averages is an ironical line which appeared in the funny column of the *Daily Illini*, apropos of the return in the second semester of certain well-known fraternity men who had been dropped out a semester for poor scholarship: "Now listen to the joyous celebration in the fraternities upon the return of some exiled flunker, batting average 52.08."

Beginning with the first semester of 1912-1913 the university at the request of the fraternities put into effect a rule providing that no freshman could be initiated into a fraternity until he had earned eleven hours of university credits. The immediate effect of this rule, as shown by the graph, was to give the general fraternity average a gain of one point over the general university average. (The actual gain of the fraternity average over the non-fraternity average was more, for the general university average includes the fraternity average.)

The direct benefit of this rule is, of course, upon the freshmen. The effect, however, has been felt by the fraternities all through, due, perhaps, to the additional emphasis placed upon scholarship in fraternity welfare, and especially upon the need which the fraternities have found to make conditions for study as favorable as possible for the freshmen. The flunking freshman has long been the "gold brick" which every fraternity might buy unwittingly. The erratic record of Kappa Sigma in 1909 and 1910, as shown by the graph, as well as the record of Sigma Nu in 1910-1911, is explained by the coming in and the going out of the freshman flunker. In these cases the average for the first semester is very low; in the second semester, after the freshman

flunkers have dropped out, the average unexpectedly climbs.

The rushing season at the university is very short and hurried, and only the most exceptional care serves to guard the fraternities against the irresponsible and purposeless freshman who will turn out to be a loafer unless he finds a strong necessity to be otherwise. There are always many such freshmen who must in one way or another be held to study during that early period which comes before they have learned the need and value of study for study's sake. This freshman rule furnishes to fraternity freshmen the necessity and incentive to do otherwise than loaf.

The following table shows the effect of this rule upon fraternity freshmen:

Average of fraternity freshmen 1st semester, 1910-11 .....	80.57
Average of fraternity freshmen 1st semester, 1913-14 .....	82.29

During the present year the fraternity freshman has been in an enviable place so far as grades are concerned, for he ranks higher than non-fraternity freshmen, higher than fraternity upperclassmen, and higher than the general university average for men, as follows:

Average of fraternity freshmen 1st semester 1913-14 .....	82.29
Average of non-fraternity freshmen 1st semester 1913-14 .....	81.19
Average of fraternity upperclassmen 1st semester 1913-14 .....	80.32
General University average for men 1st semester 1913-14 .....	81.95

The ambition of the freshman to pass eleven hours so that he may be initiated is, of course, not alone responsible for this high average of fraternity freshmen. It is to the interest of the chapter and its reputation to initiate all of its pledges; and so most of the chapters have strict rules for the conduct of the freshmen during study hours and in other ways urge them to study. I think, however, that the prospect of initiation at the end of the first semester furnishes a stronger stimulus than would the prospect of initiation at the end of a year's work. One is led to the conclusion that if the upperclassmen were as closely supervised as

the freshmen are the fraternity average would probably creep up a notch or two farther. But as it is, the gain for the upperclassman is considerable, for a good start in the freshman year is likely to stand him in good stead for the three years thereafter. For this reason the fraternity average ought to show the effect of the introduction of this rule by a rise for the next two years, or during the period while the first two classes to enter under the rule are becoming juniors and seniors.

An interesting sidelight on the new state of affairs is the fact that at the end of the first semester of 1913-1914 five freshmen were released from their pledges to fraternities mainly because they had turned out to be hopelessly poor students.

The gain shown in the fraternity average as a result of the working of these two factors is gratifying. It is, however, perhaps too much to expect that the gap between the two averages will be closed up entirely. The normal position in most universities for the fraternity average is slightly below the general average. The explanation usually given for this condition is that the fraternities harbor the lowest average men in the university, and are thereby handicapped. Even the average fraternity men will advance this explanation. The following table, based on grades made in the first semester of 1913-1914, however, seems to indicate that such explanation is not the true one:

TABLE TO SHOW A COMPARISON OF GRADES WITHIN SPECIFIED LIMITS

	Non-fraternity Averages, Per Cent.	Fraternity Averages, Per Cent.
90-100 .....	9	7
80- 90 .....	58	54
70- 80 .....	27	34
0- 70 .....	6	5
	<u>100</u>	<u>100</u>

This comparison shows that although there is a larger percentage of non-fraternity averages above 90 than fraternity averages, there is also a slightly larger percentage below passing. Apparently, then, the high and low average men are not responsible for the difference in the general averages. The middle average men

seem to have the responsibility instead. Fraternity men seem more likely to be content with grades between 70 and 80 than do non-fraternity men.

It is perhaps true that in certain chapters two or three very low men are to blame for dragging down the chapter's average, but it would seem to be true that the general fraternity average is dragged down by the men who could do 85 per cent. work, but are content to do 80 per cent. or 75 per cent. work. Fraternity men are more generally represented in outside activities than non-fraternity men and it is barely possible that this fact explains their lower average. But it has been the experience of this office that the men who are active within reasonable limits in outside activities are usually pretty good students. The loafer in the classroom is usually a loafer outside. Another explanation, which I think is somewhere near the true one, is that among fraternity men the desire for high grades usually gives way to a feeling of satisfaction with passing grades. Other rewards, not open to non-fraternity men, come to take the place of the delight in high grade work which very often is the most satisfying delight of the non-fraternity man's college life.

A vast amount of chapter history is involved in the record of the ups and downs of the various averages. Chapter conditions will almost always account for the variations from year to year. Any sudden rise or fall in any chapter's record can usually be accounted for by the character of the men who were in control in the chapter at the time. For instance the sudden decline of Delta Upsilon in 1912 can be explained by an examination of the upperclassmen at that time. The quite phenomenal rise and fall of Theta Delta Chi in 1913 is explained by the coming and going of a particularly forceful man in the chapter during the year. In most cases high averages or low averages are not dependent so much upon the presence in the chapter of a number of exceptionally high or low grade men as upon the presence or absence of a masterful leader.

The curve of the average of Zeta Psi is interesting. For five semesters it is very

low; then in one semester it takes a sudden rise, and in the next semester assumes the top place, where it remains for a quite long period. The impetus to scholarship in this chapter was furnished by the planning and activity of one man during the years 1910-1911 and 1911-1912. He worked out an efficient system for improving the scholarship of the active members of the chapters and insisted upon a careful selection of freshmen pledges. He was a determined, energetic type of man and completely and thoroughly ruled his chapter. The impetus which he had given the chapter when he graduated in 1912 enabled it to hold a high position for the four semesters succeeding. He successfully solved one of the two problems of fraternity scholarship, the problem of bringing up the average from a very low to a high place.

The other problem, that of holding the average to a high standard, seems to have been successfully solved by Phi Gamma Delta. During the ten semesters this chapter has held to a consistently high average, always holding one of the first seven places among the fraternities. In this case chapter traditions have played an important part. The reputation of the Phi Gams as good students was generally known; both faculty and students expected any and every member of the chapter to be a "shark." Working with this tradition it was not especially difficult for the strong upperclassmen to start the freshmen and sophomores on the high road. Only occasionally was hard driving necessary; the most effective factor was the good-natured, "everybody-get-into-the-game" attitude which all of the members seemed to have. This chapter has usually had one or two of their faculty members living in the house with the active members.

The sudden rise of Delta Tau Delta in 1913-1914, after this chapter had trailed most of the others for many semesters, was the result of cyclonic, plunging campaign, in which national officers, faculty members, alumni, as well as every active member, had an energetic part. A dean in the faculty, coming upon the scene at a ripe moment, entered into the spirit of the fight and lent his wise advice, a junior was appointed to be a sort of bookkeeper,

whose duty it was to keep account of all of the absences taken by the members and to record all of the scholarship reports forwarded; and a senior, a forceful, impulsive football player, forced the fighting. The interesting fact is that this high rank was attained by almost exactly the same type of men who for years had been holding the average down. An alumnus of the chapter stated to me that the reason for their improvement was that the chapter was lucky in getting rid of its flunkers, but I was able to point out to him in the present chapter men who under the old conditions would have become the laziest of flunkers, filling in the places left by the outgoing loafers. The improvement in scholarship in this chapter was not primarily due to any careful selection of members; it was due almost entirely to a change of conditions and management within the chapter. I think the experience of Delta Tau Delta offers the most helpful suggestions to chapter officers who have an ambition to seek higher standards of scholarship.

Cyclonic campaigns of this kind, however, solve only one of the problems to be met by fraternity officers; it is even more difficult to keep the average consistently high than it is to raise it for a semester or two. The graph will show that many of the local chapters do their work by spurts, apparently lacking the ability to keep to any consistent high average. This is so certain that it is not especially difficult to read the signs in any specified chapter and predict that it will go up or down at the next change.

From my observations of the experience of fraternities in matters of scholarship I have concluded that the one factor which stands out above others as being valuable and important is chapter management. A brief comparison of four fraternities, Phi Gamma Delta, Alpha Tau Omega, Sigma Chi and Delta Tau Delta, points to this conclusion rather clearly. These four chapters have been in existence in the university longer than most of the others, and they are remarkably alike in many respects. The chapter living conditions are much the same; each owns a comfortable house of about the same valuation; the expenses of the mem-

bers are very likely about the same in each case. Their faculty and alumni connections are similar; their college activity has been about equal. Their members are drawn from about the same localities, that is, the majority of their members come from down state communities. If the freshmen pledged to these four chapters were lined up it would be highly difficult to point out to which chapter the different men were pledged. But in matters of scholarship there have been many big differences during the ten semesters. The reason for these differences is without doubt in the difference in chapter management. Only in this way could one explain why freshmen so much alike on entering should make up chapters so different in scholarship.

A member of Sigma Chi contends that their greatest handicap has been in the weakness of the junior and senior classes year in and year out. A comparison of these four chapters on this point shows the following results:

	Number Initiated in Ten Semesters	Number Graduated in Ten Semesters
Phi Gamma Delta ...	53	32
Alpha Tau Omega ...	55	29
Sigma Chi .....	59	20
Delta Tau Delta ....	61	16

In a chapter where the upper classes are weak the work is doubled; more freshmen must be initiated and trained to fill up the gaps, and at the same time there are fewer upperclassmen available for developing the underclassmen and for furnishing efficient leadership. Then, too, the presence around the house of a number of men who expect to drop out at the end of the semester without trying to complete their courses is very demoralizing upon the work of all other members of the chapter. I have no doubt that many chapters could strengthen themselves very greatly by building up a tradition that the members of the chapter should feel an obligation to stay in college until graduation.

Another conclusion that must inevitably be drawn is that the fraternity upperclassmen are open to a charge that fraternity life engenders in the members a spirit of content-

ment with a grade of work somewhat lower than that of which the men are capable. The freshmen seem to be holding up their end pretty well; but the upperclassmen fail to live up to the promises of the freshmen year. This charge is really serious, and the fraternities will have to meet it sooner or later. State universities are too expensively equipped to allow any of the students to do less than their best without damaging the interests of the citizens of the state. These universities, too, are so peculiarly prepared to give a kind of training that the students may get nowhere else that fraternity men may not say that they are justified in sacrificing a part of the benefit of this training in order to get other kinds of training which, in most cases, can be obtained elsewhere. By bringing their average up to that of the general university average for men the fraternities may show that they are not guilty of the charge that they tend to develop a happy mediocrity in their members toward matters of scholarship.

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#### THEODORE NICHOLAS GILL

MANY scientific associates and friends of Dr. Theodore Nicholas Gill, who died in Washington City at noon on September 25, 1914, met on the following day at the U. S. National Museum to do honor to the memory of their deceased colleague. Among those who spoke were Dr. Richard Rathbun, Acting Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, Mr. Leonhard Stejneger, Dr. L. O. Howard, Dr. Paul Bartsch, Dr. Frank Baker, and Mr. Paul Brockett of the Museum staff, as well as Dr. Hugh M. Smith, Commissioner of Fisheries. A tribute expressing the sorrow attendant on his death and the great loss to science in general and the Smithsonian Institution and National Museum in particular was adopted at the meeting.

Dr. Theodore Gill, as he was best known, was the son of James Darrell and Elizabeth Vosburgh Gill, and was born in New York City on March 21, 1837. His early education