

WHAT WE'VE HEARD

The *Task Force on Community Standards for Student Social Events* determined that a broad outreach to the entire college community was essential to developing recommendations with respect to the College's social life, as mandated by the Task Force's mission from President Valerie Smith. In preparation for that outreach, the Task Force developed a set of "Guiding Principles for Campus Social Life" to serve as a means of stimulating the discussions. These principles are as follows:

- Social life on campus should be diverse and inclusive, offering students the chance to relax, discover, and grow.
- Social events should be safe, fun, and positive experiences that are visible to the campus community.
- A broad range of social spaces should be equitably available to all students to hold both public and private events.
- Social events should be reasonably simple for students to plan and should allow both alcohol and alcohol-free partying to co-exist.

The Task Force identified groups of campus community members whose views and recommendations would be solicited in face-to-face sessions. These groups included:

[Black Cultural Center](#)

[Counseling and Psychological Services](#)

[Dean's Office](#)

Delta Upsilon Fraternity

[Student Health and Wellness](#)

[Intercultural Center](#)

Kappa Alpha Theta Sorority

[Office of Student Engagement](#)

Organizing For Survivors

Phi Psi Fraternity

[Residential Community Coordinators](#)

[Student Government Organization](#)

[SwatTeam](#)

[Women's Resource Center](#)

In addition, President Smith sent a message to all alumni of the College, inviting their written recommendations, resulting in over 150 responses. Members of Alumni Council were invited to participate in two video sessions with the Task Force. Finally, a luncheon session, open to the entire community, was organized by the Dean's Office and was attended by about 50 students, faculty, and staff. Summary highlights of the input that the Task Force received from this outreach will be presented in later sections of this report.

At each outreach meeting, the “Guiding Principles for Campus Social Life” were distributed as a starting point for the discussions. Participants were encouraged to offer whatever comments and suggestions that they felt were appropriate. Given the charge to take a critical look at student social life, a great many of the comments we received were focused on the perceived problems with current practices and as a result don’t necessarily provide a balanced view of social life at Swarthmore. Although participants were asked to comment on all aspects of student social life, the majority of the comments we received pertained to Greek life.

The views reported below reflect what we believe we’ve heard during the outreach process. Having heard from so many individuals and groups, it is not surprising that some of the reported comments are contradictory and in direct opposition. For this preliminary document, we have not attempted to address these conflicts. In the interests of being as forthcoming as possible, we want to share all of the perspectives that we’ve heard before we begin our deliberations about recommendations.

This qualitative data of students’ lived experiences on campus is an essential component of understanding student social life at the College. Our next steps will focus on a thorough review of the available quantitative data, including five years of Public Safety case logs and the College’s Clery crime statistics. Only through this combination of qualitative and quantitative information can the Task Force gain the fullest perspective on campus social life.

We’ve organized the community comments that we’ve received into the following categories:

1. Concerns about the Task Force
2. Planning, paying for, and managing social events
3. Spaces for holding social events
4. Alcohol at social events
5. Fraternities and Sororities
6. Suggestions for change from the community.

As a visual reminder, **all views that we’ve heard from the community are presented in *italic font*, and do not reflect the opinions of the Task Force.**

1. Concerns About the Task Force

Some students and alumni expressed concern that the task force, even if it tackles the tough issues around sexual assault, is likely to foreground the experience of heterosexual white women at the expense of non-white, queer, and non-binary students.

Some wish there were more student representation overall, while others wish for more representation of people of color on the committee.

Many alumni expressed concern about representation of fraternity members on the committee and expressed concern that the work of the task force was a “fait accompli” against fraternities.

Many alumni have voiced concern that this not become another decision like the one to eliminate football.

2. Planning, Paying for, and Managing Social Events

It can be difficult to advertise social events. Students typically publicize events through Facebook, by hanging banners in Sharples, or posting flyers around campus.

Several different social events may be held at the same time in competition with each other, and students aren’t always aware of all of the options.

“Pub Night” is an appealing event for some students, but has been reduced in frequency due to the challenges of organizing and financing.

Students feel that hosting a party with alcohol is a lot of responsibility and are not always willing to take that on.

Students are reluctant to put forth a lot of effort to plan an event if they don’t feel that they can attract enough attendees, and the perception is that only events with alcohol will be well attended.

In general, the number of events with alcohol has been in decline in recent years.

25Live, the campus scheduler, is still relatively new and many students are not familiar with how to use it.

3. Spaces for Holding Social Events

Students are not aware of all of the spaces that are available to them for holding events.

The college needs better and more varied options for social spaces (especially more options for spaces with alcohol).

“Parlor Parties” were recently launched as a non-alcohol option; time will tell how much they appeal to students.

Some students find it more attractive to go to social events off campus, including places such as Bryn Mawr and Haverford.

Alumni wonder why the Tarble Student Center was not fully replaced after being destroyed by a fire.

The Crum Café, held in the student dining hall, has become a positive addition for campus social life; many hope that this can be sustained even after the current organizers have graduated.

4. Alcohol at Social Events

Significant portions of the student body are opting out of the more public parts of the College social life entirely and socializing with alcohol in dorm rooms and with small groups of friends because they don't feel welcome or even safe in the larger College party culture.

Students of legal age who want to host a party with alcohol must find funds for this expense on their own.

BYO events are possible, such as a beer garden, where students over 21 can check in their alcohol.

First year students are the most vulnerable to over drinking, especially in their first semester on campus.

At parties with alcohol, some female students report unwelcome physical contact (touching, groping).

Student surveys show that about a third of Swarthmore students do not drink alcohol.

Approximately a third of students on campus are old enough to legally drink alcohol.

Some students miss drinking games while others feel that the elimination of drinking games has had a positive effect.

Partly as a result of restrictions on alcohol at social events, more drinking takes place beforehand at private events, largely in dorms.

5. Fraternities and Sororities

First-hand accounts were provided by survivors of sexual violence that occurred at or originated at fraternity houses. Several people shared that they believe more incidents occur than are reported due to fear of retaliation.

Some students don't feel safe even walking near the fraternities on the weekends.

Toxic aspects of fraternity culture spill over into Olde Club when fraternity party goers show up en masse, take over the party, don't interact with anyone there, and then abruptly leave.

Some students don't feel safe on their own dorm room hallway because of fraternity brothers and athletes who live on the hall and loudly party at hours when dorm parties are not allowed.

Having dues paying organizations seems to contradict the College's goal of having a cash-free campus, though DU, Phi Psi, and Theta all strive to have scholarships and subsidies available to students who cannot afford the dues. Other campus groups do not have up-front dues, but do have other student costs, such as spring break trips.

Because of their control of a house and access to dues money for alcohol, fraternities play a disproportionately large role in campus social life. Other campus groups find it much more difficult to organize events, especially events with alcohol.

Fraternities have exclusive control of prime campus social spaces, and no other uses for these college-owned properties are ever considered.

The college charges the fraternities rent for the use of their space, but some question whether this expense is fairly determined or fully adequate.

When one of the fraternities is suspended that space becomes unavailable to everyone.

While theoretically exclusionary, fraternities and the sorority have a history of offering membership to all who seek it.

The Sorority functions well without access to a large campus party space.

Some students do not feel safe or welcome at fraternities.

Music played at fraternity parties contains racial slurs and misogynist lyrics.

Some feel that there is a lack of racial, economic, gender and cultural diversity in fraternities, although the fraternities offer data to dispute this.

Fraternities establish positive and long lasting bonds with other students and alumni.

Fraternities contribute to the diversity of campus life by offering a different culture than other organizations.

Some of the rules violations occurring at fraternity houses are attributable to non-members attending events at the house.

Some concerns about the existence of fraternities relates to their possession of a house, not to their existence as a social organization.

Fraternity houses are good places to get away from stress of campus life.

Fraternities provide a service to the college by hosting open social events with alcohol, assuming the accompanying liability and responsibility.

It is inequitable that male fraternities have houses, but the female sorority only has a small meeting space.

A student referendum in 2013 showed general support for fraternities.

Fraternities are an anachronism, and have been steadily disappearing from Swarthmore and our peer schools. If they didn't already exist, there would be no movement to create them.

Public Safety "goes easy" on fraternity misbehavior.

Having a student reside in the fraternity house seems questionable, especially because this means that there is a bedroom in a party space. In addition, fraternity members are not eager to live in the houses.

6. Suggestions for Change from the Community (Again, these are presented as heard and do not reflect the views of the Task Force.)

Develop a more diverse party scene (both with and without alcohol).

Encourage a wider range of student groups to host parties.

Make student more aware of funding available to host parties.

Foster a more adult view of alcohol consumption rather than binge drinking.

Limit the number of party permits that one particular group can have per month.

No group on campus should have exclusive rights to a particular party space.

Reconsider policy of allowing fraternities to have exclusive control of their houses.

If fraternities continue to control the houses, then these spaces should be made available more broadly for use by other campus groups, either in partnership with the fraternity or by using the space independently.

Proceed with the redevelopment of Sharples as a student center.

Limit parties with alcohol during first semester while new students are becoming acclimated to campus social life.

Improve relations between Public Safety and students. Provide a forum for students to easily communicate concerns. Students feel that Public Safety Officers don't consistently enforce the rules. Some report that students of color receive unequal treatment by Officers. Those officers who patiently explain the rules, who de-escalate the situation, and are non-confrontational, are much appreciated.

Provide a Pub on campus, perhaps limited to students who are 21 and older.

Students do not feel safe at night because campus is too dark—more lighting is needed.

Consider whether the existence of fraternities helps or hurts the college during the recruitment and admissions process.