

Go (far away from) greek

UNL should remove elitism by deleting the system of fraternities and sororities



GRAHAM EVAN JOHNSON is a graduate student studying German and European Environmental Social Studies and is a Daily Nebraskan columnist.

As the new school year begins, the disgusting fact of elitism in this public university and other universities in this country rears its head, just as it has every year since the system of fraternities and sororities has been in existence. The system of fraternities and sororities, although not openly admitted or expressed, is a system for economically well-to-do white people to gather with others of their kind in a sort of public display of high society connections, status and superiority. These people live in the nicest and closest houses to campus, drive nice automobiles and wear their respective greek letters as a sort of brand to distinguish themselves from the herd of other system conformists. Brands are for cattle. The problem lies in the mere existence of these elitist organizations, the mentality they produce and the stratification they create on campus. First of all, the fraternity and sorority system generally produces negative attributes such as ill respect toward others and others' belongings, excessive and sometimes violent behavior, superficiality and a lack of concern for the general public. Also, these groups significantly control the student government and other areas of policy in this university. Perhaps this is because of a lack of involvement by individuals unaffiliated with a fraternity or a sorority, but nevertheless, it is the truth. I remember living in a fraternity at the University of Kansas, and I remember my experience there. I also remember living in Germany, which further strengthened my dislike for the elitist greek institutions and reaffirmed my belief that these organizations are not only personally destructive and repressive, but socially immature as well. The fraternities and sororities in the United States are not as strongly politically backed as

they were in the past, but they still are to some degree and more so in other countries around the world. The fraternities and sororities in the United States are still funded largely by wealthy, politically conservative individuals, but fortunately, most of these conservatives aren't as radically racist as they have been in the past. In Germany right now, the fraternities are still funded by those who made a lot of money during the disaster that was World War II - conservative neo-fascists. The fraternity members in Germany also live in the nicest and oldest houses near campus, and the initiated individuals must fence with swords in order to become members. These elitist organizations in Germany are still heavily funded by wealthy, right-wing, neo-fascist conservatives, but they are protested against by an even larger, more vocal group of individuals who name themselves "autonymes" or autonomouses. These people heckle, jeer, throw eggs and curse the members and the despicable existence of these elitist groups that embody all that is negative about Germany and its past. Here in the United States, the organizations of fraternities and sororities are accepted as blindly as the possession of handguns and the absurd laws that govern the age of alcohol consumption as "just the way things are." No one stops to question these immature popularity contests that also embody much that is negative in this society - namely economic and race stratification, superficiality, binge alcohol use, over-enthusiastic material goods consumption and an idea that connections are more important than qualifications. The presence of these organizations on public university campuses is a contradiction to the meaning of university scholarship because they present an unhealthy atmosphere of inequality, irresponsibility and disrespect. Perhaps in the formulating years fraternities were used to shape and pursue scholarship as a sort of "gentleman's club," but even then, they consisted only of wealthy, white males. Obviously life isn't fair, but in an era that stresses the importance of equality and fairness of study and work opportunity, these silly clubs for boys and girls stand in clear contradiction to these ideals and equality. Although equality of education is far from a reality in the United States, the public university sector should acknowledge its responsibility to

provide a learning environment that is devoid of organizations that are solely based on economic and ethnic standing. What they need to do with the fraternity and sorority houses on campus is convert them into community living facilities like that of Love Hall. They should not necessarily be same-sex living establishments, but communal living arrangements that teach respect and responsibility through experience and accountability for one's actions.

Communal housing arrangements are severely lacking on this and many other public university campuses in the United States, but are abundant in the university systems of Europe and elsewhere. The campuses of Copenhagen, Heidelberg and Amsterdam all provide many structures for communal living that are far superior to the stereotypical dormitory of the United States in terms of freedom, privacy and responsibility. And it is this type of housing arrangement that fosters growth, understanding, diversity and social change. Communal housing arrangements, where individuals are responsible for their behavior and the well-being of the living quarters, are sorely needed if the people of the United States are ever really going to begin working together and understanding one another, rather than just perpetrating tokenism. Mr. Chancellor, remove elitism from this campus by transforming the system of fraternities and sororities into public, communal living establishments, and accept the responsibility of truly changing the atmosphere of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. The learning and social environment of the campus would be so drastically improved that no one now is able to comprehend the benefit. Perhaps that is one reason why this elitist system still exists. For the thousand or so people I may have offended with this article, do not take offense. Instead, look at your situation within the system of fraternities and sororities and ask yourself, "Why?" Why bother with conforming to something you don't agree with, or just "going along with it" because it is a popular thing to do and "everybody's doing it"? And for every thousand people who I may have offended, there are at least ten thousand who I'm sure are in agreement with me and would like to see the conversion of these elitist clubs into communal living arrangements for the simple purpose of social growth and for a real step toward understanding difference. See reality, people. The world is not a cute little club consisting of homogenous dress and attitude. It is far more complex and far more important. The world is a big place, and not everybody is in a club. Try and imagine these facts, and do the one thing that you will never, ever regret: Remove yourself from the system of fraternities and sororities.



Communal living facilities are wonderful, because they allow for the interaction of all types of people, regardless of age, sex, religion, race, color, nationality and language. They also allow for the learning of socially responsible behavior including respect for others and others' belongings, cleanliness, sharing and cooking. Fraternities and sororities, which are prevalent at UNL, provide for privileged homogeneity and dependence and are very distant from the teachings of diversity and respect.

At your service

Student assistants can make time spent at school much, much nicer



ERIN REITZ is a senior theater performance major and a Daily Nebraskan columnist.

Ahh... the delights of the early fall - moving in when it's 102 degrees outside (and 10 degrees hotter inside), spending your life savings on your first two textbooks and needing a student loan for the rest, getting prematurely (and usually unnecessarily) nervous about your classes. You have to love it. If you are lucky enough to have moved into a residence hall (in 102 degree heat), you have met your student assistant, and in all likelihood, it was far from the horrors of which I have just spoken. Hopefully, this person welcomed you to your floor and introduced you to a few of your neighbors. Hopefully, you were told where the cafeteria and laundry rooms are located and what to do if you find yourself locked out of your room wearing only the towel you

got as a graduation present. Hopefully, the experience has helped to make everything else a bit more bearable. Hopefully, you were nice to this person. If you've never experienced the phenomenon that is the residence halls, you may be wondering what it is that your student assistant does, exactly. Well, guess what kiddos, I'm gonna tell ya. You see, boys and girls, your SA is here to help make your home-away-from-home life a little easier. Your SA is a confidante, a friend, a resource and a policy enforcer. Your SA can show you how to get involved on campus and how to get help for almost any problem that you may have. SAs will help you make it through the insanity that can be the first and last few weeks of school (and all of the lunacy in between). Your SA will try to show you all different sides of this school and encourage you to risk new (legal) things. **DO NOT BE AFRAID!** One thing I've discovered in my years at this fine institution is that college is only really fun if you are willing to make a complete fool of yourself every once in awhile (or most of the time). Guess what? Your SA can help you to do just that! Your floor or hall will probably have programs where you have to get dressed in a corny outfit and shoot

your neighbor. (Well, not really shoot them. Come on people, guns belong in the police station!) You might be asked to wallow around in the mud, write your name with your butt as an icebreaker, or even go trick-or-treating in the old Mr. T costume you've tucked lovingly away in your bottom dresser drawer. Once again: **DO NOT BE AFRAID!** It's college - you're expected to act this way. Plus, these things give you a nice break from thinking too much about the vessel-popping final you may be about to take. Just promise you'll do me one BIG favor. **Humor them.** Humor them like crazy. Go to their programs, even if your SA is not the one putting them on. Don't be afraid to karaoke and carouse a little. What you get out of your floor community is what you put into it. So I suppose the phrase "Put out or get out!" actually applies this time. OK, maybe not. Sorry. The point I am trying to drive into your skull is that it is not immature and dorky to do fun stuff with your floor. If you get social every once and awhile, you could meet people who may become lifelong friends. You could discover a hidden talent that you never knew was there (writing your name with your butt, for instance). You could even learn something. No kidding.

Because your friendly student assistants are working so hard to make your life in the hall a good one, they not only deserve your participation, they also deserve your respect. They're people just like you and me. Well, exactly like me, because I am an SA. Just like that timeless babe Aretha, we can't tell you enough times how much we appreciate your r-e-s-p-e-c-t, especially when we ask something of you that you may find unpleasant. It means a lot that you show enough courtesy to turn down the music (and the bass) when asked at 3 in the morning, and that you resist that burning urge to spray the fire extinguisher down the hallway. Live animals in the restroom are also a definite no-no, by the way. Remember, non-dangerous fish only, please. In a tank. Thank you. This truly is one of those jobs that you are clueless about until you attempt it. It's a lot harder than it looks, so give us a break. Nobody likes to tell you that what you're doing stinks. Who would want to be in the position to regurgitate policy to their friends and put their behinds in check? (We're not sadists. Really.) If you do happen to really screw up, it's just like the high school principal's office - things will be better for you if you cooperate. Don't yell and scream, don't throw things, don't slam your door and blow cigarette smoke

through the broken-out peephole. If you really don't want to be living in the hall, move out. Don't torture your SA for fun (that's what younger siblings are for, for Pete's sake). There is a really great sense of community that can come from being a part of a floor, and if you don't want to be an active part of it, you don't have to be. It's always very appreciated, however, if you can try not to be the resident from hell, either. It's pretty stupid to risk your right to housing just for the thrill of doing something juvenile. It's always been amusing to me when someone attempts something like, oh, for instance, blowing up half of a building and expects not to get in trouble. These people are good at acting very surprised when they get moved off the floor or evicted. (That one's kind of a no-brainer, don'tcha think? I knew you'd agree with me.) What I'm encouraging you to do is not to blow up buildings, but to get out that Mr. T costume. If you get positively involved on your floor and your hall and have a healthy respect for your SA, there will be a lot less temptation to do the stupid stuff that could put your butt in a sling. So play nice. Leave the attitude at home. Be kind to your student assistant. Oh, and don't forget to feed that non-dangerous fish.