A HISTORY OF THE WOMEN'S "GREEK" SYSTEM
AT WAKE FOREST

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Outline

Controlling Idea: To trace the establishment of a regulated women's "greek" system at Wake Forest.

I. Introduction--Societies at Wake Forest
   A. Historical overview of women's greek organizations
   B. Purpose of women's greek organizations

II. Comprehensive look at women's societies
   A. The existing societies
   B. The societies which disbanded or formed a new group

III. Intersociety Council (ISC)
   A. Historical look
   B. Purpose

IV. Rush
   A. Historical look
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V. Sororities and the future of the societies
   A. The existing sororities
   B. Reasons for change and options

VI. Conclusion
Wake Forest College admitted women into collegiate life in 1942. Within six years, many coeds desired a group of friends with whom they could identify, comparable to men's fraternities. Groups, known as societies developed with this desire in mind. These local societies, similar to national sororities which formed as a "protective league through which members endeavored by united action to secure recognition for themselves as a vital part of college life," have become a traditional facet of the women's "greek" system (Martin 47). Throughout the past 47 years, many changes have occurred, yet the unique women's greek system has persevered and become an integral part of Wake Forest collegiate life.

Women's greek groups have striven to provide a social opportunity to make lasting friendships and to serve the campus and community. Wake Forest's society system developed as an "expression of women's need for identity, place, and contribution" in a predominantly male school. The faculty and administration viewed societies as too social and providing an atmosphere which "prolongs adolescence," yet favorable aspects included the friendships, contributions, and groups with which one could identify (Leake 2/17/93). Today, women's greek organizations offer members the opportunity to participate in intramural sports, to sponsor social functions with fraternities and other women's groups, and to adopt service projects, while providing a sisterhood to support every member in their endeavors.
As early as 1947, Lois Johnson, the first Dean of Women at Wake Forest, questioned the formation of national sororities on the campus. She wrote to the Deans of Women at eight colleges similar to Wake Forest, expressing her concerns. Of these schools, five had sororities and six of the schools perceived women's sororities as discreditable to the campus. Dean Johnson did not pursue the idea of sororities because she believed that the female students did not need or want sororities. Meanwhile, one "secret" society had already formed in 1946 to serve the same purpose as a sorority in a local setting. In 1956, Wake Forest College moved to Winston-Salem and the number of women admitted to the college increased. On January 9, 1956, a statement of the Faculty Committee of Student Life reported, "The committee is unanimous in its opinion that sororities shall not be encouraged." Dean Johnson believed, "The problems which often arise with fraternities are aggravated with sororities." However, with the growing amount of women, two more societies, S.O.P.H. and Fidele, emerged. Finally, during the Spring semester of 1963, the three existing societies petitioned the faculty for official recognition (Leake records).

Under Jeanne Owen, the acting Dean of Women from June, 1962 until June, 1964, a committee formed to study the petition and to consider the implications of national sororities. Many of the faculty generally opposed fraternities and did not want to expand social organizations with the establishment of sororities. The former Dean of Women, Lois Johnson, felt the
concept of sororities at Wake Forest to be controversial among the "Baptists of North Carolina." The administration and faculty concluded that they would have more control over societies than sororities, and on November 15, 1963, the Wake Forest College Faculty accepted an amended petition granting a three year trial period for the societies to prove themselves and develop their structure (Leake records, 2/17/93).

In 1964, acting Dean Owen claimed that, "much...needs to be done during these trial years to help the women see that Wake Forest has no need for petty, cliquish sororities." She repeated this sentiment and the negative attitudes toward sororities at Wake Forest in a letter to a Phi Mu Sorority representative which stated that "any discussion about sororities would be a complete waste of your time and mine." The approval of the societies' petition stipulated that all girls who rushed with at least a C average must have a guaranteed bid. Although on October 31, 1966, Jeanne Owen, now a Professor of Business Law, stated, "I see no evidence of any contribution to the intellectual or cultural maturity of the individual women or to the enrichment of the community," the faculty fully recognized the societies in 1967 under the new Dean of Women, Lula Leake (Shaw 4: 305). The societies chose to limit membership to 60 girls. For this reason, new societies would form when the need arose. New groups had to have 15 founding members, a faculty advisor, and a constitution for approval (ISC Constitution). Today, society membership is no longer limited to 60 or
guaranteed to everyone. Over the span of years, 14 societies and four sororities have developed to serve the needs of undergraduate women in a purposeful manner.

Currently, six women's societies exist at Wake Forest University. Strings, S.O.P.H., and Fidele, the three original societies which petitioned for recognition in 1963, remain the oldest societies in Wake Forest history. Strings, founded in 1946, began as a parody of Tassels, an honor society with very high membership standards. This joke developed into the first women's social society. Boasting the symbols, the anchor and the stringman, and the colors, navy and white, Strings Society provides friendship and leadership opportunities. In 1956, after years of secret meetings where girls lived up to the motto, "United we are as strong as a rope; divided we ravel," Strings became officially founded. S.O.P.H., founded as a "secret" society with the mascot, Ziggy, and the colors of light blue and white, formed on October 10, 1957. The ten founding sisters prided themselves on their unique sisterhood. Fideles, with the motto, "First in Friendship, Fellowship, and Fun," began with a group of dissatisfied members of Strings and S.O.P.H. With a pig mascot and the colors, crimson and white, Fideles stand for the ideal of fidelity (Leake records).

Of the remaining societies, Thymes is the fourth oldest. Founded by 22 freshman girls desiring a service oriented group, Thymes claims the lion mascot and the colors, green and gold. Thymes, the spice of life symbolizing energy, activity, and
courage, formed on December 8, 1968 (Thymes Charter scrapbook). Lynks, with an elephant mascot and the colors, burgundy, pink, and gray, formed on November 18, 1980. The Lynks Society considers itself a chain representing a whole where each individual Lynk must work together. In 1986, Delphi Society formed with a dolphin mascot and the colors, black and turquoise, to represent "unity through diversity" (Howler 1986).

Over the years, many societies which formed died out for a variety of reasons. Les Soeurs, "a sisterhood of not-to-secret swingers," formed in the fall of 1963 and disappeared in 1972 (Howler 1969). Laurels, founded in spring of 1964, also died out in 1972. Petale, a unique society for day students, formed in April, 1966 and became extinct after its members graduated. In 1968, Cameo formed only to disband in 1969 after a very disappointing rush (Leake records). Steps, which formed on March 6, 1972, prided themselves on their motto, "Sisterhood Together Each Person Separate" (Howler 1985). The society later disbanded in 1986. Rigels formed on April 14, 1975 and folded in 1980 after a fatal decision to not take a pledge class (Howler 1980). In 1976, the first black society formed a group, Sisters of the Afro-Am, but later disappeared (Leake records). Phoenix formed in 1983 and in 1991 merged with a group of independent women to become a national organization, Alpha Delta Pi. With the exception of Phoenix, the groups which died out typically experienced a bad rush or became surplus societies which did not have the energy or dedication to persevere.
The InterSociety Council (ISC), formed in 1962, consisting of representatives from each society, served as a governing body for the societies. Its stated purpose included maintaining society relationships, furthering the academic life, cooperating with the administration, providing a forum for questions, and formulating the rules involving rush, pledging, and initiation (ISC Constitution). The Wake Forest College Faculty approved the ISC Constitution in the Spring of 1964. Along with the societies, ISC has evolved in a variety of ways. In 1967, ISC revised its constitution and established a cabinet and committee to improve the functioning of ISC (Howler 1962). The year 1985 brought a newly acquired society lounge and a column in the Old Gold and Black titled "ISC News" (Howler 1985). In 1986, an orientation process fully developed for rushees, and a judicial committee formed to effectively enforce ISC policies (Howler 1986). On questions of conduct, societies not only had to answer to ISC but also to the Judicial Board, the Administration, and the Dean of Women who served as an "advocate and corrective in the same package" (Leake 2/17/93). The InterSociety Council has managed over the years to continually promote the goals of the women's greek system and the University in its organization of fund raising, service projects, inter-society relations, and its fulfillment of the social and personal needs of women.

Rush, a necessary function to prolong the life of greek groups, has been viewed in various ways over the years. Rush
originally began as a two week process in the spring, allowing freshman time to adjust to collegiate life. Rush later expanded to a four week long process. In 1969, some women viewed rush as too long, superficial, and time consuming (Howler 1969). In December of 1975, the faculty finally allowed societies to be selective in giving their bids, no longer guaranteeing a bid to every rushee. This decision also resulted in a fall rush which gave upper-class women the opportunity to rush. In 1978, ISC began giving uniform notes to rushees which revealed the societies which still held an "interest" in them. Due to complaints, rush shortened to three weeks in 1979 and later to two weeks (Howler 1979). Over the years, women's rush included society parties and skits, room rush, serenades, and hall visits. Many students perceived rush as providing "a sense of belonging to those rushees and societies members as they renew the bonds of coeds on a predominantly male campus" (Old Gold and Black Spring 1964). Women's rush has continued to strengthen the greek organizations and remains a fundamental part of greek life today.

President James Ralph Scales said on January 9, 1969, "Anytime local societies exist, there will be some question about 'going national'" (Leake records). Over the years, the idea of national sororities arose, but the collegiate women failed to take an active interest in national organizations, despite conducting an intense study of sororities in 1979. However, during the past six years, the emergence of four
national women's organizations brought a new variation into
the Wake Forest greek life. Delta Sigma Theta, an
African-American sorority became the first national organization
on campus when it formed on April 14, 1988. Received favorably
by the administration, the sorority centers itself around service
projects. Both Delta Sigma Theta and Alpha Kappa Alpha, another
African-American sorority formed on April 16, 1990, hold their
own rushes, apart from the other societies. Their rush
process invites women to apply for membership into the sorority
(Lincoln 2/23/93). Delta Delta Delta began organizing itself
in October of 1987. Although societies originally thought of
Tri Delta as an asset which would "provide our local
organizations with a link to the nation," the societies later
became hostile to Tri Delta because they thought its presence
might threaten their existence (Tri Delta Scrapbook). However,
the Gamma Kappa chapter of Tri Delta became installed on February
1, 1989. After almost two years of preparation, the Phoenix
Society affiliated with the national sorority, Alpha Delta Pi,
on April 2, 1991. This event set a precedent for the societies
which had considered national groups but chose not to lose their
traditions (Petroshius 2/21/93). These national sororities
have effectively integrated into the Wake Forest greek life.

In 1968, the society system described itself as "optimistic
of the future, wary of the present, but always finding time
for intramurals, studying, and raising hell" (Howler 1968).
Twenty five years later, the society system has survived but
finds itself facing a very uncertain future. The national sororities on campus carry insurance which local societies do not carry. With the threat of lawsuits related to the monumental court case, Hart v. Ivey in September of 1992, which made social host liability a reality in North Carolina, the societies must have the necessary insurance because the University will not cover them under its policy. Kenneth Zick, Vice President of Student Life, stated that societies were "too much of a risk and it would effect the whole insurance picture for the University. We want them to be responsible for their own events" (Zick 3/25/93). Unless an insurance policy can be found, disbanding or becoming national organizations remain the only viable alternatives for the six remaining societies. The fall of 1993 will bring the unknown fate of the societies.

The women's greek system at Wake Forest University developed out of a great need for women to have friendship groups from which they could serve themselves and others. Although the future of the traditional societies remains uncertain, the national sororities have proved that the women's greek system can persevere under change. Originally viewed as unnecessary, over the past 47 years women's greek organizations have confirmed themselves as an integral part of the Wake Forest community in their promotion of sisterhood, sports, school spirit, service activities, and school relations.