

Vowels

## DELTA PHI ALPHA

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The stimulation of greater interest in the German language and literature among students is an objective of every American teacher of German. One of the agencies which has been successfully employed by the writer and many of his colleagues throughout the country to encourage and fortify student interest is the national German honorary fraternity, Delta Phi Alpha. This article offers a brief exposition of the genesis, aims, and methods of Delta Phi Alpha and a summary of the activities of local chapters in a number of typical colleges and universities.

Efforts to found a national German student fraternity can be traced back at least a generation. The late Professor Carl Schlenker of the University of Minnesota cherished such a plan for years. The University of Syracuse, the College of the City of New York, and the University of Colorado were noteworthy pioneers in the movement. But no fraternity of national scope was realized until Delta Phi Alpha saw the light of day on May 27, 1929.

It was founded at Wofford College, Spartanburg, South Carolina, by Dr. James A. Chiles, Professor of Modern Languages. At the time, Wofford College had a local honorary German club (*Deutscher Verein*). The French club at Wofford College enjoyed the advantages of a national organization, and the members of the *Deutscher Verein* felt that a nationwide honorary society would greatly enhance the dignity and effectiveness of their local activities. Invitations were accordingly sent to active German clubs in about twelve or fifteen small colleges to form chapters of a national fraternity. The name Delta Phi Alpha was suggested by the words *Deutscher Verein Amerika*, but an appropriate Greek motto was chosen for the initiatory ritual.

Before the end of 1929 three chapters of Delta Phi Alpha were formed, namely Alpha at Wofford College, Beta at Central College in Fayette, Missouri, and Gamma at Bates College in Lewiston, Maine. The growth of the fraternity has been slow because of its rigid requirements. That it has been steady and healthy is revealed in the following tabulation of charters granted:

1930: Vanderbilt University; Davidson College, North Carolina; Berea College, Kentucky; University of Rochester; Birmingham-Southern College; University of Washington.

1931: Rutgers University; West Virginia University; Alabama College; Wittenberg College, Ohio; University of Cincinnati; Duke University; University of Illinois; University of Pennsylvania.

1932: University of South Carolina; New York University; Western Reserve University; Bucknell University; University of California at Los Angeles; Washington University, St. Louis.

1933: Indiana University; Cornell University; Clark University.

1934: University of Colorado; University of Buffalo; Southern Methodist University; University of Southern California; Union College, Schenectady, N. Y.

1935: Colgate University; Miami University, Oxford, Ohio.

1936: University of Oregon; University of Tennessee; Hunter College; University of Iowa.

1937: Drake University; Capital University, Columbus, Ohio; Baldwin-Wallace College, Berea, Ohio.

Thus in nine years this fraternity, which began as an organization in small colleges, has spread to forty chapters in every part of the country from Maine to South Carolina and from the State of Washington to southern California, and now includes some of the largest universities aggregating a total German enrollment of thousands of students.

Qualifications for admission of new chapters require an enrollment of at least seventy-five students in German, with a fair proportion (at least 25) in the upper classes, and a first-rate teaching staff. They also demand that the institution be of high rating and be recognized by the best accrediting bodies. To be eligible for membership students must have had a minimum of twelve semester hours of college German, a minimum average grade of 85 in German, indications of continued interest in the study of the German language and literature, and good standing in all courses of study. Many colleges applying for charters have had to be rejected because of these rigid requirements. Many chapters have established their own minimum requirements for admission in excess of those set by the national constitution. Delta Phi Alpha may therefore justly be called the Phi Beta Kappa in the field of German studies.

In the arduous work of organization Dr. Chiles, who has displayed rare creative ability and indefatigable zeal, was assisted by Mr. John Olin Eidson, then a member of his advanced class in German, now on the staff of the English Department at the University of Georgia. A constitution governing the fraternity was adopted by a vote of the chapters in March, 1932. We quote a few characteristic paragraphs:

"The national honorary German fraternity Delta Phi Alpha seeks to honor excellence in German and to give students thereby an incentive for higher scholarship.

"The fraternity aims to promote the study of the German language, literature, and civilization, to further an interest in and a better understanding of the German speaking people, and to foster a sympathetic appreciation of German culture."

The National Council consists of a National President, First and Second Vice-Presidents, Secretary-Treasurer and National Counsellor. The present incumbents in the order named are Dr. Chiles, Dr. A. W. Porterfield of West Virginia University, Dr. Frank H. Reinsch of the University of California at Los Angeles, Dr. Edwin H. Zeydel of the University of Cincinnati, and Dr. Paul R. Pope of Cornell University.

No officer of Delta Phi Alpha receives any salary, and national dues are purely nominal. A fee of \$5 must accompany the application for a charter and each individual member pays a \$1 national membership fee at the time of his initiation. There are no other national fees or assessments, although the individual chapters may assess their members in accordance with their local needs. The funds which accumulate in the national treasury are used for current expenses of the organization as a whole and for publishing the annual bulletin, which contains very interesting letters of the activities of the various local groups and which

should be of great value to anyone seeking hints for German club programs. As the resources of the fraternity permit, prizes for outstanding achievement are offered, and the annual bulletin may develop into a regular periodical. Delta Phi Alpha has its own colors, insignia and stationery, as well as very attractive jewelry, the purchase of which is entirely optional.

As may be seen from the foregoing, Delta Phi Alpha is not a substitute for the undergraduate German Club or *Deutscher Verein*, but rather a superstructure. In large centers like Cincinnati it has proved, incidentally, an invaluable means of keeping in touch with former students and in preventing the spark of interest from dying. Alumni six years out of college and graduates of other Delta Phi Alpha institutions coming here for professional studies in medicine, law, or the like, still regularly attend the monthly meetings on the campus or at the homes of members of the staff, and thus, though far from being professional Germanists, form a group which is perhaps unique in American educational history. It has also given the more promising underclassmen active in the *Deutscher Verein* something higher to aim at and an incentive for continuing work in the department.

In closing this account of an organization which is bound to become an ever more important factor in our field, we would quote from the Charge to the Initiates, a part of the regular Ritual: "Im besonderen verbindet uns der Geist des deutschen Klassizismus. Lessings Duldsamkeit, Herders Volksverstehen, Schillers Idealismus und Goethes edle Menschlichkeit rechnen wir unter die großen aufbauenden Mächte in der Menschheit."

The writer will be glad to mail copies of the constitution and annual bulletin to any colleague who may be interested, confident that he is thereby furthering a movement which provides definite stimulation to greater effort on the part of students and a definite technique for securing a more permanent interest on the part of our alumni.