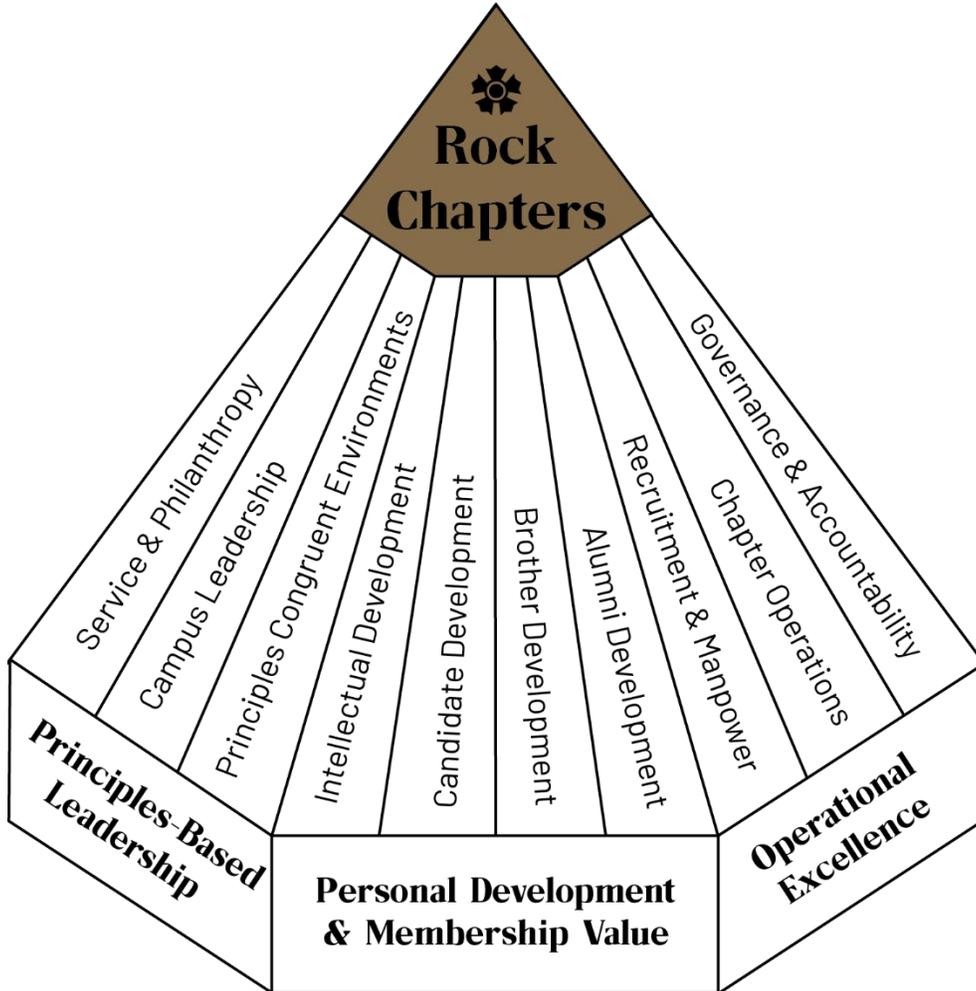


# Pursuit of Excellence Program Overview & FAQ



## **Our Mission**

To develop ethical leaders inspired by the principles of Love, Honor, and Truth.

To foster the personal growth of each man's mind, heart, and character.

To perpetuate lifelong friendships and commitment to the Fraternity.

## **Our Vision**

Excelling with Honor

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# Overview

The Pursuit of Excellence Program (PEP) is Sigma Nu Fraternity’s assessment, standards, and improvement program. Unlike traditional “minimum standards” programs, the Pursuit of Excellence Program is designed to be a year-round planning, evaluation, and improvement program.

The Grand Chapter adopted the current program in 2008, based on three overarching categories of chapter operations that are broken down into ten (10) specific areas for measurement:

## Principles-Based Leadership

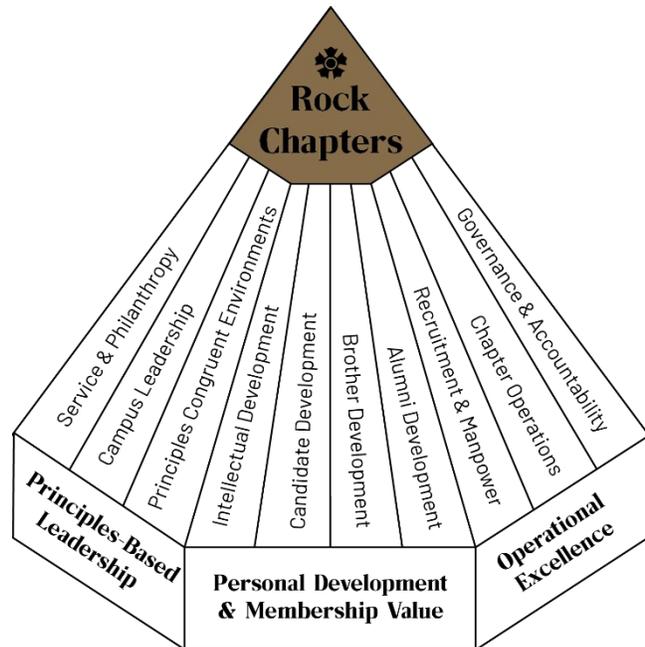
- Service and Philanthropy
- Campus Leadership
- Principles Congruent Environments

## Personal Development and Membership Value

- Intellectual Development
- Candidate Development
- Brother Development
- Alumni Development

## Operational Excellence

- Recruitment and Manpower
- Chapter Operations
- Governance and Accountability



## PEP in the Era of Coronavirus

Unique for the 2020–2021 academic year, there were two versions of PEP – one for chapters operating mostly in-person and one for chapters operating mostly virtually. The program resources and criteria were adjusted to reflect the limitations of either operating in-person with social distancing restrictions or operating mostly virtually.

For 2021–2022, the Fraternity retained the in-person operations resources and criteria for chapter use. Unlike the prior year, nearly all campuses intended to operate in-person. The criteria and resources continued to offer virtual and hybrid alternatives for chapters. The in-person criteria also continued to account for pandemic conditions and allow for chapters to substitute virtual activities in place of in-person events. As chapters may continue adapt some operations to a virtual format – for health & safety, efficiency, or other reasons – resources for adapting operations to a virtual format can be found in the [Virtual Operations](#) section of the Best Practice Library.

## PEP Recalibration

The High Council updated the Fraternity’s strategic plan in the summer of 2021 with a new goal to, “evaluate and re-calibrate the Pursuit of Excellence Program to continually improve chapter performance across the Fraternity.” As colleges and universities have come back to normal operating conditions the High Council reviewed the evaluation guidelines to reset expectations and raise the bar for chapter performance. Criteria from both pre-pandemic and pandemic operations were reviewed, modified, extended to lower performance levels, or removed considering the future the Fraternity expects chapters to help create as we emerge from the pandemic. In this way, the Pursuit of Excellence Program has taken the best, most relevant criteria from pre-pandemic, retaining criteria modified during the pandemic to continue to spur chapter innovation, and bringing in additional criteria from similar campus-based or other national fraternity programs to keep Sigma Nu chapters striving for the

optimal fraternity experience. Finally, the High Council’s review was conducted to ensure the evaluation guidelines:

- Appropriately reflect the Fraternity’s strategic plan, policies, and programs.
- Provide clear distinctions between each performance level.
- Continue to promote improvement of chapter operations relative to achieving increasing levels of excellence.

The High Council reviewed pre-pandemic and pandemic era criteria, as well as suggestions from General Fraternity staff to institute best practices for chapters as an expectation (i.e., Acceptable criterion) and/or at higher positive performance levels. The resulting updates to the evaluation guidelines include:

- Removing criteria that are no longer relevant due to changes in Fraternity policy, practice, and programs.
- Retaining or modifying criteria that were amended during the pandemic and have promoted innovation and improved efficiency and effectiveness in chapter operations.
- Adding new criteria to promote continuous improvement by chapters, to ensure clear distinctions between each performance level, and to institute Fraternity or fraternal community best practices.

**More information on the process used to update the evaluation guidelines in 2014, during the pandemic, and in 2022 is available [here](#).**

## Evaluation Process

Chapters are annually evaluated in each subcategory. Annual evaluations take the form of a chapter self-assessment which is supplemented by feedback from an assessment team of advisors and staff. In the final assessment each subcategory is evaluated on a seven-point scale from poor to excellence. The full rating scale is provided below.



A rationale for each rating is communicated to the chapter along with recommendations for improvement. Chapters receiving an overall level of excellence for one of the three standard areas are recognized for the Pursuit of Excellence in that standard and chapters which maintain an overall level of excellence for a period of two years or more are recognized as Rock Chapters.

## Feedback and Coaching

In addition to the self-assessment and documentation submitted by the chapter the General Fraternity solicits input from an assessment team of individuals who have regular interaction with the chapter. Chapters should actively engage each of these individuals throughout the year as they develop goals, implement plans, and reflect upon the year. The assessment team includes:

- Chapter’s Leadership Consultant
- Division Commander
- Chapter Advisor/Alumni Advisory Board
- Campus Fraternity/Sorority Advisor

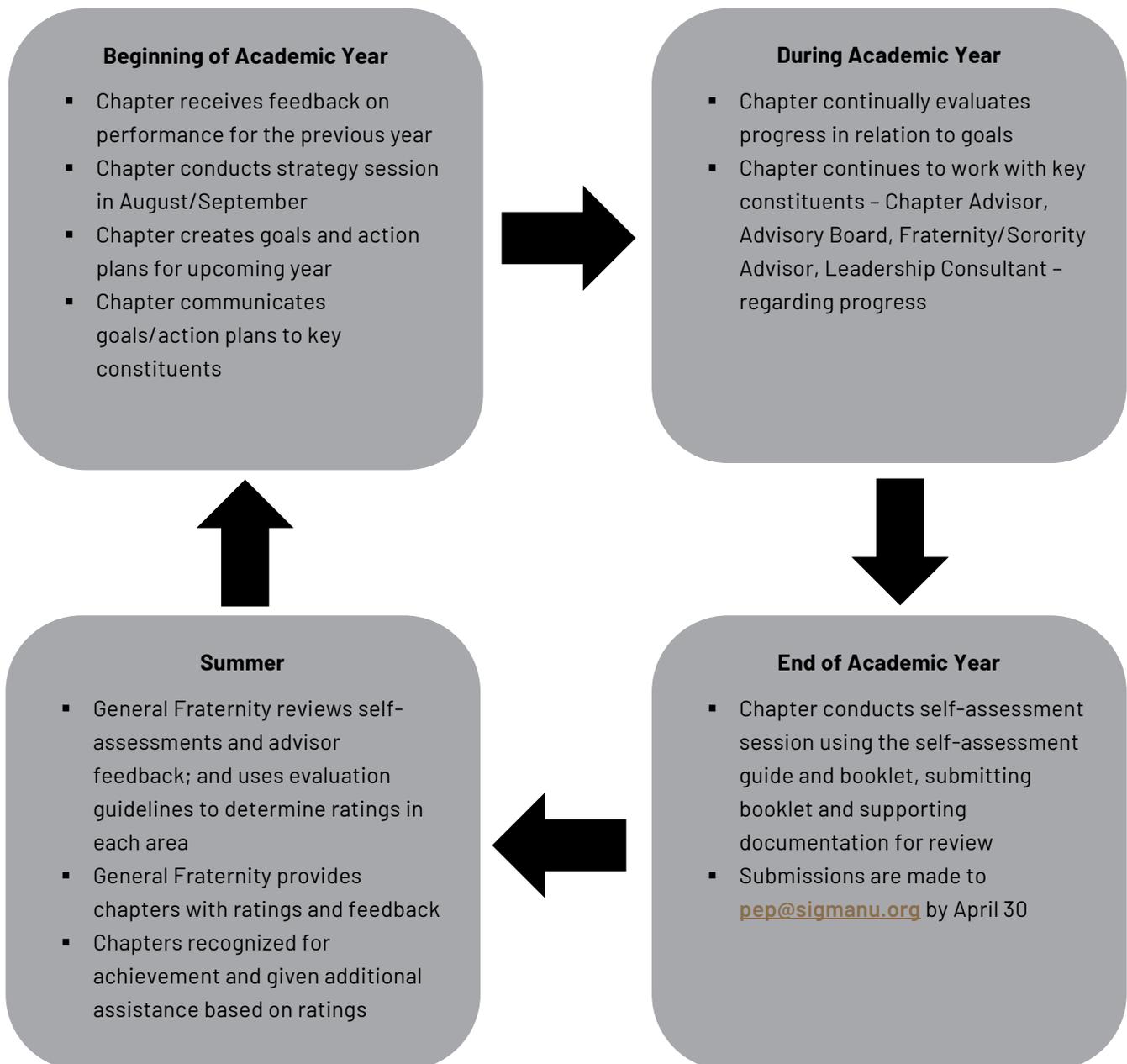
While chapters are working on their own self-assessment, these advisors will be solicited by the General Fraternity for feedback on the chapter’s performance over the past year. The assessment team will be asked to rate the chapter on a scale from Poor to Excellence in each subcategory of the program. As a part of that rating, they will be asked to provide a rationale for the rating as well as suggestions for improvement in each area. Ratings and

additional information provided by the assessment team are designed to provide a greater depth of understanding regarding the chapter's current state and to provide perspective on a chapter's own self-assessment. *Chapters will NOT be negatively impacted by non-submission by any assessment team members.*

## Program Benefits

The program presents various benefits to the Fraternity: increased involvement and engagement from chapter members, a better understanding of chapter strengths and challenges emerge for the purpose of chapter improvement, increased feedback is provided to collegiate chapters, and the follow up mechanism involves key constituents. Finally, processes are streamlined by combining Pursuit of Excellence and Rock Chapter, and all evaluations of the chapter by the General Fraternity, alumni volunteers, and advisors are brought into alignment with each other.

## Program Timelines



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## Awards and Recognition

### PURSUIT OF EXCELLENCE AWARDS

Chapters receive ratings that correspond to an achievement level in each of the ten subcategories. Each year, those chapters who have reached an achievement level of Excellence in at least three subcategories of a standard will receive **recognition** for the Pursuit of Excellence in that standard (e.g., a chapter rated at the Excellence level in all three subcategories of Principles-Based Leadership would receive the Excellence in Principles-Based Leadership award).

### ROCK CHAPTER

The **Rock Chapter Award** is meant to honor collegiate chapters that have achieved excellence in all areas of chapter operations. To be granted the award, a chapter should be expected to attain the ideals or a nearly perfect state across a broad range of areas of fraternity operations. It should also be noted that risk management and behavioral issues are included in the judging process. In addition, to win the award, a chapter should be expected to maintain a state of excellence for a given period, not just for a semester/quarter of one school year. Furthermore, the award once granted, should not be considered recognition for future achievement (i.e., once a Rock Chapter, always a Rock Chapter), but recognition for past achievement with an appropriate date inscribed indicating the precise year which the award represents.

Finally, the Rock Chapter award is only presented at Grand Chapters, (i.e., every two years), providing there are chapters that qualify. *Due to the postponement of Grand Chapter from 2020 to 2021 the Fraternity is granting Rock Chapters for both the 2018-2020 and 2019-2021 periods to recognize two-year performance over the triennium. Future Rock Chapter awards will align to the new Grand Chapter schedule (i.e., odd years; 2021-2023, 2023-2025...).* Rock Chapter award recipients will be those chapters which consistently achieve Very Good to Excellence ratings in the Pursuit of Excellence Program over the course of the biennium.

### MOST IMPROVED CHAPTER

The **Most Improved Chapter Awards** are meant to recognize those collegiate chapters that have displayed the greatest operational gains over the course of the biennium. Qualifying chapters are those that have shown significant improvement in their Pursuit of Excellence Program ratings from the first to the second year of the biennium. These chapters, should they maintain performance at their current levels, are expected to rise to the level of Rock Chapter in the subsequent biennium.

## Accountability

All chapters of the Fraternity are required to submit documentation for the Pursuit of Excellence Program by April 30 of each year. **Failure to do so may result in a suspension of the chapter. This suspension prohibits the delinquent chapter from hosting, co-hosting, sponsoring, or participating in any events with alcohol. If after a period of six months the delinquent chapter has still not submitted documentation, all activities of the chapter may be suspended.**

In addition, **chapters receiving an achievement level below Acceptable in a subcategory must submit a plan of action for improvement in that area to the General Fraternity.** That submission should be made by September 30. Failure to submit a viable plan for improvement may result in a suspension from hosting, co-hosting, sponsoring, or participating in events with alcohol.

### PEP CHAPTER SUPPORT PROGRAM

Chapters receiving an **achievement level below Acceptable in five or more subcategories** may be placed into the Fraternity's **PEP Chapter Support Program**. These chapters will work with the General Fraternity staff to develop a strategic plan and create operational plans to make improvements across all areas of chapter operations. Further,

they will receive personalized guidance and support throughout the year culminating in the submission of their self-assessment by the end of April the following year. **Chapters placed into the Support Program will be limited to three (3) events with alcohol for the academic year and must receive approval from the General Fraternity for each event.**

Appeals will be considered by the Office of the Executive Director for special circumstances on a case-by-case basis. If the appeal is not granted, then the chapter may appeal to the High Council.

## Resources

### EVALUATION GUIDELINES

The [Evaluation Guidelines](#) provide an objective standard of assessment for all chapters. The guidelines show chapter performance levels from Acceptable to Excellence along the assessment continuum for the program's ten subcategories. While all chapters should direct their efforts towards, and strive for achievement in, the Excellence range across all subcategories, a level of Acceptable must be attained in each for chapters to remain in good standing. A copy of the evaluation guidelines for ratings of Poor, Substandard, and Fair are available upon request. As these performance levels describe chapter operations at levels below the Fraternity's minimum standards, they are not proactively provided in this or other resources.

### STRATEGY SESSION

The [Strategy Session](#) is designed as an All-Chapter LEAD session to be conducted by chapters at the beginning of each academic year. The session engages chapter members in the strategy and problem-solving process to create direction for the chapter's continued improvement.

### CHAPTER IMPROVEMENT PLAN GUIDELINES

Chapters with one or more deficiencies should use the [Improvement Plan Guidelines](#) as a resource in creating their improvement plans.

### SELF-ASSESSMENT GUIDE

The Fraternity's official instruction manual for chapters to use in creating their annual submission for the program. This step-by-step guide includes an overview of the program, guidance notes for completing the chapter's self-assessment session, and instructions for completing and submitting the chapter self-assessment booklet and supporting documentation.

### CHAPTER SELF-ASSESSMENT BOOKLET

The standard, formal booklet for chapters to complete as their annual submission of documentation for the program. This editable form should be completed and submitted by April 30.

Self-assessment resources, including the guide and booklet, can be found at [sigmanu.org/pep](http://sigmanu.org/pep).

## History of the Pursuit of Excellence Program

Part of the Strategic Plan adopted by the Fraternity's High Council in November of 2000, was to develop a set of "minimum standards" for chapter performance. In response to the charge, the Grand Chapter created the Pursuit of Excellence Program in 2002 as a minimum standards program for the Fraternity. This represented a great step for the organization in the establishment of standards to guide our undergraduate chapters. This program consisted of various criteria within six areas: Membership Development, Chapter Development, Chapter Management, Support Structure, Chapter Governance and Campus and Community Involvement.

At the 62<sup>nd</sup> Grand Chapter in 2006, it was resolved that a review of the Pursuit of Excellence Program should be conducted, and recommendations should be made for updates to the program. An ad hoc committee began meeting via conference call in January 2008 and proposed a revised program at the 63<sup>rd</sup> Grand Chapter in July 2008.

## PHILOSOPHY THAT GUIDED CHANGES TO THE PURSUIT OF EXCELLENCE PROGRAM

As the Pursuit of Excellence Ad-Hoc Committee began its work, several underlying principles guided their thinking.

- The Pursuit of Excellence Program should set a standard that drives our collegiate chapters and the entire organization toward the realization of the Fraternity's vision "Excelling with Honor."
- Standards should be set to assess our chapters in their alignment with the mission of the Fraternity.
- It is vital that the program includes a viable feedback mechanism whereby chapters can utilize information from the assessment to drive the organization forward toward excellence.
- The Pursuit of Excellence Program should align with the Rock Chapter criteria and work in support of the Fraternity's strategic initiatives under the Strategic Plan.

# Frequently Asked Questions

## When will chapters begin working on the Pursuit of Excellence?

At the start of the academic year, chapters and their alumni leadership – Chapter Advisor, Alumni Advisory Board – should review the feedback and ratings they received from the previous year. This will help to inform a [strategy session](#) (an All-Chapter LEAD workshop) to help the chapter set a vision and goals for the upcoming academic year.

## How can the chapter engage more brothers in the process?

Chapters will be able to engage the entire chapter in a dialogue about plans and goals for the upcoming year. This will be done through the discussion questions and facilitation tools provided in the [strategy session](#) in All-Chapter LEAD. The ideas and plans that result from the discussion should then be shared with key constituents. This process will help the chapter engage a broad support network and develop relationships that may result in increased support.

## How can chapters assess their progress?

Throughout the year chapters should continually engage in self-assessment. Chapters will be most successful when they are constantly evaluating their progress as it relates to the standards of the Fraternity. Once again, this creates an opportunity for the entire chapter to have discussions about the progress of the chapter. In addition, during the year chapter leadership should meet with alumni, their Division Commander, Leadership Consultant, and campus Fraternity/Sorority Advisor to talk about progress and challenges. If these individuals are already aware of the chapter's goals from conversations earlier in the year, they will be more effective in helping the chapter throughout the rest of the year.

The final assessment will take place towards the end of the academic year (mid- to late-April). First, the chapter leadership should meet with their Chapter Advisor and/or Alumni Advisory Board and their campus Fraternity/Sorority Advisor to evaluate the previous year. This will be a great opportunity for the leadership to get some guidance in their reflection. It will also help those advisors in providing an informed perspective to the General Fraternity in their reports.

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## What will chapters do to prepare for end-of-year self-assessment submissions?

Chapters will also complete a self-assessment at the end of the year. To do this the chapter will utilize the self-assessment guide provided by the General Fraternity to complete a chapter self-assessment booklet.

## Who will serve as the “Assessment Team” to help evaluate chapters?

While it is not financially feasible to fly in an assessment team to each campus, we can create a form of an assessment team which can provide different perspectives toward a more complete picture of the current reality of a chapter. The assessment team will consist of the following:

- Chapter’s Leadership Consultant who submits a report as a part of their semesterly consultation.
- Chapter Advisor or Alumni Advisory Board who submits a report at the end of the year based on their interactions with the chapter throughout the year.
- Division Commander submits a report at the end of the year based on their interactions with the chapter throughout the year.
- Campus Fraternity/Sorority Advisor who submits a report at the end of the year based on their interactions with the chapter throughout the year.

## What is the purpose of the Assessment Team?

The purpose of these inputs is to provide a greater depth of understanding regarding the chapter’s current state. It also helps to infuse feedback from each of these people into the information that is communicated back to the chapter so that they can understand how they are perceived by others. Now, we do recognize that it may be a challenge to collect reports from some of these individuals at different institutions. It would not be the responsibility of the chapter to gather these reports; they would submit them directly to the General Fraternity. Further, if someone did not submit a report it would not negatively impact the chapter. For example, if your Chapter Advisor did not get around to submitting the report, it would not have an adverse impact on the chapter’s achievement level. Also, each of these reports would represent only one piece of a large picture. If one person had a skewed view of the chapter, it might not necessarily impact the chapter negatively.

## How will chapters conduct their own assessment of progress?

The original program (2002-2008) required chapters to compile a binder of documentation to accumulate various points at the end of the year. Generally, this process was delegated to one or two officers in the chapter and was not incredibly enjoyable.

The current process is designed as a collaborative process among all officers/committees and the chapter. Typically organized by the Lt. Commander, each officer/committee works on their portion of the assessment, shares the results with the chapter at large, and allows the Lt. Commander to edit and compile into a collective, final submission on behalf of the chapter. The self-assessment includes a guide with discussion questions. As a chapter you will bring your members together to discuss what you did to excel in each standard. Then, the answers to those questions along with some supporting documentation that you want to attach will become your Pursuit of Excellence submission. This engages the entire chapter, and hopefully makes the Pursuit of Excellence Program more about brothers sitting down and talking to each other than one or two brothers compiling binders of documents.

The self-assessment guide and chapter self-assessment booklet are available online and should be used by all chapters. Both include step-by-step instructions for performing the assessment session, completing the booklet, and making the chapter’s annual submission to the General Fraternity. Each chapter should submit their completed chapter self-assessment booklet and any supporting documents via email to [pep@sigmanu.org](mailto:pep@sigmanu.org) by **April 30 of each year.**

## How will General Fraternity Staff evaluate chapter performance?

General Fraternity staff will use [evaluation guidelines](#) which define criteria for each achievement level from Poor to Excellence. This will create consistency across evaluations. This also ensures a focus on evaluating chapters individually to the standard rather than trying to rank chapters in relation to one another. The information from the evaluation will be communicated back to chapters, key alumni, and campus advisors. Finally, the Leadership Consultant can use this feedback in planning upcoming consultations for optimal effectiveness in addressing chapter needs. In this review by the General Fraternity staff, each chapter will receive an achievement level on a seven-point scale that ranges from Poor to Excellence. They will also receive an explanation for that rating and suggestions for improvement. This feedback will be important if the program is going to have the purpose of driving our chapters toward constant improvement.

## How will chapters be evaluated?

Chapters will receive their achievement level in each of the ten subcategories. The rating scale for each area is provided below. Specific benchmarks for each area can also be reviewed in the program's [evaluation guidelines](#) document.



If chapters receive ratings below Acceptable – the mid-point of the seven-point scale – in any subcategory, then the chapter must submit a plan of action to the General Fraternity to articulate how the chapter will improve in that area. If a chapter has an achievement level below Acceptable in five or more of the subcategories, then they may be placed into the Fraternity's PEP Chapter Support Program.

## How will chapters who are excelling be recognized?

Each chapter which has an achievement level of excellence in three or four subcategories of a standard will receive recognition for the Pursuit of Excellence in that standard. So, for example, if a chapter receives Excellence ratings in all three subcategories of Value-Based Leadership they will receive an award for Excellence in Principles-Based Leadership. *For Personal Development and Membership Value – the only standard with four subcategories – an excellence rating in 3 or more areas, with the fourth being Acceptable or higher, will be recognized for Excellence in that standard.* Thus, each year we could have any number of chapters receiving recognition but would only recognize those chapters who were deserving.

## What is the purpose of the improvement plans?

The purpose of the improvement plan is to create a specific course of action that will help a chapter improve areas of weakness or challenge. This plan should be submitted to the General Fraternity within the first month of the start of the academic year. The chapter should also share this plan with alumni and campus advisors to engage their support and guidance.

It is still possible that a chapter that fails to create improvement plans could be recommended for suspension, however, the focus is placed heavily toward guiding and coaching chapters toward success. It should also be noted that at this point no chapters have been closed because they could not meet the basic expectations of the Pursuit of Excellence Program.

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## What happens if a chapter is placed into the PEP Chapter Support Program?

Chapters will work with a General Fraternity staff member to create an overall action plan for improvement in all areas. This will include the creation of a strategic plan at the beginning of the academic year (September), addressing operational infrastructure items throughout the fall (e.g., updating bylaws, revising their candidate education plan, and creation of a written scholarship plan or year-round recruitment plan), priority to receive two three-day consultations during the year, participating in progress check-ins throughout the year, completing an officer transition program dedicated to carrying forward the new operational plans created in the fall, and regular submission of the next year's self-assessment (April).

Chapters in the support program will be limited to three (3) events with alcohol that academic year. All events must be reviewed in advance by General Fraternity staff.