

STUDENT

Argumentative and Persuasive Writing

Ms. Kelm

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Ben Smith: The Brotherly Chaplain

When he first came to Baylor as a meager freshman, Ben Smith did not have any intention of joining a fraternity. However, on his first day of Business Calculus, he met Blake Barnes—a member of Sigma Phi Epsilon—and Barnes made it his mission to change Smith’s mind. Smith was on the fence about going through recruitment during his first semester, but after spending time with Barnes and other fraternity members, Smith thought he would give formal spring recruitment a shot. He went into Rush Week with two different fraternities in mind: Sigma Phi Epsilon and Alpha Tau Omega, figuring that if he hated it, he would simply drop. What struck Smith about Sigma Phi Epsilon was that he “didn’t feel like [he] had to impress SigEp;” instead, he felt that Sigma Phi Epsilon was out to make a positive impact on him. Needless to say, Smith was given a bid from Sigma Phi Epsilon.

Upon joining, Smith knew he would seek a leadership role, and he figured he would take an Executive Council position in his junior year. His two ideal positions were chaplain and finance—chaplain being his first choice and finance being the practical one, since he is an accounting major. However, shortly after he was initiated, elections were held for Executive Council. At the elections for the Executive Council, members from the fraternity nominate qualified chapter members for each position; after nominations, the chapter votes on the best candidate. Surprisingly, Smith was nominated for chaplain and won the vote. He, a freshman, was both shocked and excited, ready to implement his new ideas within the chapter.

As a junior, Smith has been elected for chaplain thrice; he knows the terrain well. Within each chapter of Sigma Phi Epsilon, the chaplain acts as head of a five-person committee that serves as standards board, which adjudicates punishment for the entire chapter. If a member breaks a chapter bylaw, he is called into the board to hear his punishment. Smith helps the committee delegate appropriate punishments, which puts him in tough positions sometimes. Smith cited a specific incident where he had to suspend a close friend near the time of Executive Board elections. Smith knew this member wished to run for a position; however, Smith had to suspend the member due to the severity of the infraction. Unfortunately, this meant that his friend was unable to campaign or be elected for an Executive Council position. Smith does not enjoy delegating punishment amongst his brothers, but he hopes that members will understand why he is punishing them and that his actions are in their best interest.

Smith, as chaplain, is also in charge of every ritual, including setting up and taking down for ceremonies. Smith cannot divulge details to me—ritual information is a fraternity secret shared only among members—but leading rituals is a lengthy process. Under this category, he is also in charge of inventory for rituals. Smith must reside over formal chapter meetings, initiation, and other rituals. He is in charge of organizing each event and making sure members attend.

Sigma Phi Epsilon, Texas Rho, recently underwent membership review after hazing allegations hit their chapter. Membership review is the process of Sigma Phi Epsilon's National Headquarters coming in and interviewing each individual brother; the result is Nationals pruning the chapter of problematic members. While, again, Smith was not allowed to divulge much information on the topic, it presented an interesting aspect to his position. After the review, Nationals was in charge of the appointment of Executive Council members, which is deviating from the norm, seeing as Nationals usually has no say in elections. Smith was appointed chaplain

by Nationals, which means this is his third consecutive year in the position. Nationals saw the positive changes Smith was making within his chapter, and appointed him to his position in the hopes that he would continue with his progress. It is clear that both Nationals and members support Smith and believe he is the best fit for chaplain. When asked what Smith's take on membership review—and whether it was positive or negative for the chapter—he said, “Membership review is a catalyst for change. I want to take it to the next level and show people what SigEp is about.” Smith has already implemented new initiatives to accomplish this endeavor.

In light of his recent appointment, Smith has made some drastic changes to his regime. Smith is working with all the men in the chapter to develop an Academic Council. When asked why he took this step, Smith said, “I took it upon myself as to start this council so all of our members have the chance to succeed in the classroom.” This new council is made up of three members that are not on the Executive Board and promote the chapter's academics. Smith felt like the academic standards were not ideal before membership review, and he sees this as an opportunity to increase the chapter's GPA. Smith and the members of the Executive Board believe that academia should be each member's top priority; unfortunately, some members chose to put their fraternity above grades, hence the lower-than-desired GPA. Now Smith hopes to use this council to promote learning through required study hours for members with low GPAs and face-to-face interactions with members that are not spending as much time studying as they should.

After membership review, Sigma Phi Epsilon, Texas Rho, has been cut down to less than twenty active members. Instead of letting this hinder him, Smith sees this as a chance to create close, personal relationships with each member. As chaplain, Smith is the man to go to when

members are facing personal problems. When asked if chaplain had the same religious connotation within Sigma Phi Epsilon as it does in the general Baylor community, Smith said, “For me, it wouldn’t be beneficial to have a certain correlation with a specific religion. However, if people want to talk to me about their faith, I am the person members come to.” Smith’s goal is to better the fraternity through uplifting each individual, and Smith hopes that members feel comfortable and open around him. With his amiable personality, it is clear why both Nationals and members have elected him to this position.

Smith’s role on the Executive Board has changed throughout his three terms. While there is no official hierarchy among the positions on the Board, Smith has a fair amount of sway in the group’s decision making. Being a junior, Smith has three years’ worth of experience and the other members on the council see that; therefore, Smith has a lot of influence on their opinions. As the chapter’s moral compass, both the council and other members look to Smith when making tough choices. Smith acts as both the chapter’s moral guidance counselor and its judge of character.

Being a member of the Executive Board has bettered both Smith’s collegiate experience and his future. Smith has been able to build brotherhood through his relationships with members and through his contributions to the chapter as a whole. Smith plans on entering the business world this summer through an internship with Edward Jones in his hometown of Saint Louis, Missouri, and he believes that being on Executive Council has offered him a glimpse into how to handle certain scenarios that will be present in the business world. Serving three terms on Executive Council is a marketable tool that has—and will continue—to help him on the job market. Smith stated that, “being on exec is like having a job,” and he thinks that his experience has bettered him as a person and as a professional.

As chaplain, Smith is consistently consulted when making decisions that need moral guidance. While his position is a tough one, Smith has bettered his fraternity through personal relationships and keeping members aligned with Sigma Phi Epsilon's morals.