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## Looking back at a crisis, one year later

### One year after Sigma Chi's controversial "Halloween in the 'Hood" party, little has changed

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One year later, few substantive changes have been made within the University in response to the controversial Halloween in the 'Hood party.

"Many of my constituents are upset Justin Park is back on campus," Black Student Union President Brenton Pennicooke said in reference to the ex-Sigma Chi brother who orchestrated the event.

"Some feel he got off too easy. We understand he didn't serve his full time, and some of us are upset."

In December, Park's sentence was "substantially reduced" according to a press release by the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education (FIRE), which advocated for Park during his appeal to Dean of Student Life Susan Boswell.

"The University cannot comment on disciplinary action taken against a student, due to a federal privacy law," University spokesman Dennis O'Shea said.

"Justin is no longer a part of Sigma Chi, and, out of respect for his wishes, we will not comment on his sentence," said Patrick Connell, vice president of the Hopkins chapter of the Sigma Chi fraternity.

Park was originally suspended until spring 2008, following a hearing before the Student Conduct Board last November.

The BSU was the first to protest the party and Sigma Chi, and brought the event to the media's attention. The Conduct Board called primarily on BSU members to testify.

"The BSU's goals were never punitive," Pennicooke said. "We wanted [Park] to understand how his actions were offensive. Our goals have always been educational."

The BSU urged the University to open discussions on racism between students and faculty. In September, the University hosted a forum with author Beverly Daniel Tatum. Incoming students were required to read Tatum's book, *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria? And Other Conversations About Race*, to encourage a dialogue on racism.

The BSU would like to see the University do more to promote discussions on racism.

"That was a step in the right direction," Pennicooke said. "The next step would be to have a dialog between the administration and the students. After discussion, cultural groups will come together."

"There is certainly more to discuss on the issue of what is offensive," said Dorothy Sheppard, associate dean of students.

"We need to provide whatever outreach we can provide and be as proactive as we can be to promote discussion. I don't want students to be afraid to say anything for fear that what they say will be viewed as offensive. I'd like to have a safe environment where students feel like they can have open discussions about differences," Sheppard said.

In the weeks and months immediately following the incident, Sigma Chi worked with the BSU and others to try to raise awareness for the racial issues faced by the campus, according to Connell.

"This incident has made us a lot more aware of each other," said Rob Turning, coordinator of Greek Life.

"The IFC-type groups are more aware of the historically black groups, who are in turn more aware of Asian interest groups. This event has brought every group together. It's opened their eyes to the diversity in Greek life."

"I can't speak for all the Greeks, but it seems that Sigma Chi is generally interested in reaching out to the community and making sure that their programming in the future is very positive and brings students together rather than dividing them," Sheppard said.

"The events and resulting punishment have had a profound impact on Sigma Chi," Connell said.

"Since the incident, we have done our best to work with the administration and community to try to have as positive an impact on those around us as possible since the events of last year."

The University placed Sigma Chi on social probation through Jan. 5, 2008. The probation required the fraternity to hold eight cultural events.

"We've done our best to tighten our bonds with both the University and the community," Connell said.

In the past year, as part of its cultural events, Sigma Chi worked with Delta Xi Phi, the multicultural sorority, and SASH to bring to campus an Indian comedian, who addressed the effects of race on young people.

The fraternity also co-sponsored concerts with Peabody. Additionally, Sigma Chi made sandwiches for homeless shelters and attended a University-sponsored field trip to Baltimore's Reginald F. Lewis Black History Museum.

Pennicooke stressed that cultural forums should speak to all cultures.

"Black students, Latino students, Asian students, white students -" Pennicooke said, "Cultural awareness should speak to the entire Hopkins community."

Connell explained that due to the fraternity's proactive and continued community service, they are allowed to have up to three social events this semester, with the requirement that prior to each event 50 percent of the members participate in an additional hands-on community service activity.

Each event will be approved on a case-by-case basis.

"I'm not certain that any changes I have seen in Greek Life can be directly or solely accredited to last year's incident," said Caroline Bennett, student-community liaison.

"I feel confident that certain positive lessons were taken from this event and know that even one year later it is still discussed. I have seen a lot of positive growth in the Greek organizations that I have worked with. They have all taken steps to better handle their social events and have been very receptive to my suggestions. Because of their work, parties are more controlled, the coming and going of guests flows better and the handling of party-related trash has improved."

"Since last year, the office of Greek Life has made it easier for Greek organizations to register parties," Turning said. "Instead of a paper form it's all an online process now. We've done a more blatant job of telling the presidents that they need to let us know what's going on."

Turning credits the increase in registered parties to the new system.

"It's a process that's building," he said.

Turning believes students are being more careful now when planning events.

"That's the most noticeable thing," he said.

"There's more thought going into the process. People are more aware of what's acceptable and what's not, or what may or may not offend some one."

"I did not run into any difficulties this past weekend in regards to any of the Halloween celebrations or other social events," Bennett said. "Those who went out seemed to have had a good time."

"Black students mostly want this whole affair to go away," Pennicooke said. He explained that black students grew tired of the protesting, and did not want the rest of their college experiences to be ruled by anger over the situation.

"We're collaborators. We're trying to branch out. We don't want to have to take on the role of fighting for a specific cultural faction," he said.

Black student enrollment in the freshman class is up from 73 to 93 this year, according to Dean of Enrollment and Academic Services William Conley.

"Admissions responded to the incident by working hard with undergraduate students. We wanted to redouble our efforts in giving Hopkins an image of being committed to the recruitment of multicultural students," he said.

Conley said that Admissions did not "squench or sugarcoat information on the incident."

"We didn't try to hide the Sigma Chi incident from prospective students," he said.

Following the incident, the BSU and Admissions organized transportation for prospective minority students otherwise unable to visit campus.

Conley said that Admissions now aggressively reminds applicants to submit financial aid applications. They provide assistance with the forms.

"Many underrepresented minority students require financial aid, and a failure to turn in an application, and the failure to receive any aid, can be a deterrent to enrolling," Conley said.

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