Fraternities and sororities have been a part of Cornell since shortly after the University’s founding. The Cornell Greek System is one of the largest in the country, with 66 active chapters and more than 4,000 undergraduate student members.

Participation in the Greek System produces leadership skills, lifelong friendships, support networks, civic engagement, and philanthropic initiatives. Nonetheless, challenges exist, and we must continue to work to improve the Greek student experience.

In 2011, following the fraternity hazing-related death of George Desdunes, President David Skorton challenged the Greek community, both at Cornell and nationally, to “end pledging as we know it” – because hazing occurs so often during the pledge period. In response, we assembled a task force made up of students and alumni, dubbed RARE (Recruitment, Acceptance, Retention and Education). Staff, faculty, inter/national fraternity and sorority partners, and topic experts served as resources to the task force.

After a year of deliberations, the RARE group agreed on ten (10) recommendations. We combined them with those of other stakeholders, including the trustee-appointed Fraternity and Sorority Advisory Council, interested students and alumni, colleagues from around the country, and other members of the Cornell community to develop a comprehensive strategy, and presented our report to President Skorton. This document provides an overview of that strategy and the timeline for implementation.
We will apply a 3-pronged strategy to end hazing.

- Prevention
  - Educate all stakeholders
  - Change the environment
  - Provide just, meaningful, and consistent enforcement
- Intervention
  - Develop a culture that encourages peer-to-peer and advisor intervention
  - Continue to offer opportunities for 3rd party intervention
  - Increase resources and enhance access to resources
  - Take steps to prevent infractions from going unnoticed – or unreported
- Response
  - Increase individual accountability at the chapter and systems level
  - Define sufficient and meaningful consequences

We will collaborate with campus partners, alumni, and inter/national fraternity and sorority partners at every stage. We will use research, including national and campus-specific data, to guide our actions.

Our strategy begins with the Greek community, but does not stop there. Although they are prevalent in Greek life, these practices occur outside fraternities and sororities as well, in student organizations, clubs, and teams. By recalling their core founding principles of leadership, brotherhood and sisterhood, and civic engagement, fraternities and sororities have an opportunity to serve as a model for change in other organizations.
We will implement six changes immediately:

1. We will construct a fraternity and sorority model in which all members, new or ongoing, are treated as equals. Activities in which members are coerced into unacceptable behaviors as a condition of membership will not be tolerated.

2. All chapters will adopt a single-tiered membership development model that begins with new member orientation and continues through graduation. Ongoing membership development activities will build life skills that focus on leadership, civic engagement, and career development.

3. All membership development programs must be reviewed and approved by the inter/national organization, the alumni, and the Office of Fraternities, Sororities and Independent Living before recruitment begins.

4. The new member orientation period will be reduced in the first year to no more than 6 weeks, and then one month (4 weeks) in the next year. This will help chapters focus on the transfer of legitimate and necessary fraternity/sorority-specific information, and to reduce distraction from academic work.

5. All judicial infractions will be posted on the web, available for public viewing, providing insight to potential new members and their families as they make decisions about joining.

6. We will recruit involved alumni who are willing to provide advice and support to our students in a variety of capacities.
As we come to the end of the fall semester, most chapters within the Greek community are beginning to plan for formal recruitment, also known as Rush. For the Interfraternity Council (IFC) and the Panhellenic Council (PHC), Formal Recruitment will occur during the week prior to the start of classes in January. Some Multicultural Greek Letter Council (MGLC) chapters, specifically Asian-interest fraternities and sororities, will conduct their Rush just after the start of classes.

Our first action this winter will be to mandate that each chapter design orientation to focus on sharing important, legitimate information about the organization’s founding values, purpose, and mission. We will provide chapters with guidance and suggestions for realistic, attractive activities they may consider incorporating into their orientation process. Any activity that coerces new member participation in unacceptable behaviors will not be tolerated.

We know that chapters will need guidance from many sources to reimagine their orientation activities. We will work closely with our inter/national partners and alumni to provide chapters with information and support to make a successful transition.
This new concept for orientation establishes the foundation for a single-tiered “Total Member Development” model, in which organizations conduct continuous member development activities. Members will benefit from ongoing development opportunities based on their class year and specific developmental needs. This also allows the organization to maintain focus on its core principles and on the educational mission of Cornell. This spring we expect every chapter not already operating under this model to transition to it.

These changes will place increased demands on leaders and members in the Greek System. Recognizing that they need our full support and a host of new skills to succeed in this transition, we will provide student members and leaders with additional tools to perform in their roles, including bystander intervention skills and practical leadership skills development. Whether it be a student leader who faces the challenge of commanding the respect of 70 of their peers, or the chapter member who faces the challenge of intervening in an activity he or she knows to be problematic, we want our students to be prepared to affect the situation in a positive manner.
Each chapter’s membership development program must be approved by the Office of Fraternities, Sororities, and Independent Living (OFSIL), by the alumni, and by the inter/national fraternity and sorority partners prior to the start of the 2013 formal Rush/Recruitment period.

All inter/national fraternities and sororities already have in place a prescribed or suggested model that addresses the development of members over the course of active membership. To assist our students in this transition, we will call upon our inter/national partners and alumni to help provide chapters with the resources for a successful transition to the new model.

We recognize in the first year the new membership development programs will be “works in progress”. Nonetheless, all working plans must be shared and approved.
To focus the organization’s orientation efforts on those activities that are necessary and legitimate, the University will shorten the new member orientation period. In the first year, new member orientation will last no longer than 6 weeks. Starting next year, the new member orientation process will be reduced to 4 weeks. This will reduce the impact on the students’ academic pursuits.

Guidance in restructuring the new member orientation process from the University, alumni, and the inter/national organizations will be critical to the success of the effort.
Expanding on the student-led movement to inform the public of all hazing-related violations, we will communicate transparently about all fraternity, sorority, student organization and team judicial infractions. Public notification may take the form of a web page, similar to the current hazing incident blotter found on hazing.cornell.edu.

In addition to increasing transparency of the decisions of the Greek Judicial Board and the Fraternity and Sorority Review Board, student leaders and staff see opportunities to examine and streamline components of the judicial process to increase timeliness and consistency of enforcement.

Above all, the Greek System will not tolerate any behaviors that jeopardize a student’s health and well-being. If activities cause serious harm, physically or mentally, or are likely to, the University will not allow the group to continue to operate on our campus.
With an alumni support network as strong as any in the country, we can and will increase the number of involved alumni. We will inform advisors and other partners about ways they can participate. Alumni engagement is perhaps the most critical programmatic component of this plan.

We will continue to strengthen the partnerships with alumni councils, including the Alumni Panhellenic Council (APAC), the Alumni Interfraternity Council (AIFC), and the Alumni Multicultural Greek Letter Council (AMGLC). We also will inform and engage chapter alumni, through, for example, the newly redesigned A.D. White Greek Leadership Summit, which will début in February 2013, offering high caliber programming for student leaders and a new track designed for alumni volunteers.
During Phase 2, which will begin in the spring 2013 semester, overlapping with the completion of Phase 1 objectives, we will begin putting in place a number of other initiatives. Work remains to define the details of many of these actions.

The two that we believe have great potential to change the culture are:

1. Live-in advisors – this approach provides each chapter residing in a house with an individual who can be present to bring a more experienced perspective to House norms and practices. Where these positions currently exist, student leaders and members have come to rely on these advocates when they find themselves with questions or in need of support.

2. The One Greek Cornell Community Experience – the goal of this initiative is to provide several occasions for all students interested in joining the Greek System to meet together:
   - To help them understand the benefits the Greek experience offers, avoid potential pitfalls, and understand the recruitment process so they identify the organizations that fit them best;
   - To create shared experiences that promote bonding with one another prior to the formal recruitment period, and expand opportunities to develop a broad base of friends across many chapters.
In Phase 3 we hope to complete and institutionalize many of the objectives of Phases 1 and 2. It also is important to note that these objectives will be assessed in various ways to determine their effectiveness and to measure the degree to which desired outcomes have been achieved.

Also in this phase, the community will work to determine the appropriate academic standards for membership eligibility. This will require close collaboration among student leaders, alumni, inter/national fraternities and sororities, and the University.
We have high expectations that these efforts, combined with new chapter and system level ideas generated by students and alumni, will have a tremendous impact on eradicating hazing and on improving the quality of the Greek experience.

The process we used to develop this response to the President’s Challenge has created spaces and opportunities for honest dialogue, brought about innovative ideas, challenged concepts and traditions, and offered forums for voices from across our campus community.

The belief shared by all stakeholders in this effort is that the health and safety of our students are paramount. We also acknowledge that this plan is a beginning, and that additional ideas may be incorporated later in the process.

While the coming transition may test our resolve, we support and recognize those organizations that are committed to conducting healthy activities and safe practices.