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THE GREEK SYSTEM

by Gary Weissman '02

A traditional “home away from home” on the Dartmouth College campus has been the Greek system. Thirteen fraternities and eight sororities provide a safe space for a large percentage of undergraduate students. Two of these sororities and one of the fraternities are traditionally African American organizations. Three co-ed houses are also affiliated with the Dartmouth Greek System.

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Dartmouth’s racial environment is confounding: on the one hand the administration celebrates the continuing quest for a diverse student body, touting increasing minority programs and enrollment. The student body, on the other hand, has a recent

history of race-related verbal abuse, self-segregation, and consistent apathy toward discussion of such issues. The Greek system being the central social structure on campus, well intentioned or not, stands near the root of the paradox. In spite of, or because of this proximity, the question still stands: does the Greek system provide a home to racial minority students?

On November 16th, 2000, MOSAIC, a student organization for students of multiracial/cultural backgrounds and an outspoken leader in raising awareness of multicultural issues on campus, hosted an event bearing the weighty name, “Race and the Greek System: How the Greek System reflects and affects

the state of race relations at Dartmouth.” This event included a short documentary film, a panel discussion, and then further discussion in smaller groups with the attendees. Panelists included: Ryan Garcia '01 (Latino member of Gamma Delta Chi), Chris Ellis

'00 (black member of Alpha Phi Alpha), Ellie Leahy '01 (white and unaffiliated), Sarita Hudgins '03 (a mixed heritage member of Sigma Delt), Christena Cleveland '03 (black and unaffiliated), Ben Mandelker '01 (white member of Sigma Phi Epsilon), Erin Naipo '02 (of Native American heritage and member of Kappa Kappa Gamma) and Aaron Akamu '01 (unaffiliated native Hawaiian). The assumptions governing this event were: a) the Greek system, as the largest campus social structure, does play a role in race relations, and b) change of the structure cannot begin without dialogue among members of the minority and Greek communities.

Leahy, a white student and former lacrosse player, is an active MOSAIC member. Having spoken out at the panel during the Fall, Leahy continues to voice her beliefs about Greek life as a social option.

“[Greek houses are] trying to preserve the white upper class world that is changing around them,” she says, noting Dartmouth’s struggle to overcome its very traditional white male past. Leahy is outspoken in her contention that Dartmouth doesn’t ask very much