

Alpha Phi Alpha fraternity alive, well on the UI campus

By Jane Roskams

You may not have heard of the Alpha Phi Alpha fraternity. This may seem unusual for a fraternity that boasts a membership that includes such eminent people as the late Dr. Martin Luther King, athlete Jesse Owens and politician Andrew Young.

However, the fraternity, which is exclusively for black students, has not only been in existence, but has been active on the UI campus since 1975.

The fraternity, conceived and born at Cornell University in New York City in 1906, was brought to the Palouse by two Washington State University students, Mark Davis and Ron Allen.

Thus, the Iota Tau chapter was born, and now boasts a membership of 14 which they hope will increase to 20 when their current pledging period ends. The international organization, which encompasses the Virgin Islands and Africa as well as Hawaii and the entire United States, now has a total membership of approximately 80,000.

Curtis Johnson, current dean of pledges at the UI chapter, is also a former president of the APAs. "We are pledging at the moment, and it looks like

we've got some really good people who are interested in becoming brothers."

Joe Taylor, another former president, says that the fraternity encourages its members to bring out their own individual talents. "We're very tight together," he says, "but in the same way, we all have different talents, and we set very high standards that we like our brothers to keep to."

Johnson agrees. "Although we have a lot of athletes, we can't stress enough the importance of academics to our brothers." During the pledge period, they hold a study table, and try to help out their new pledges.

"The whole focus of our fraternity is to learn," Taylor said. "We run the frat, bring it to its pinnacle, and then we back off so that the other guys can learn. We like to help them learn — both socially and academically."

The APA motto, "First of all, servants of all, we shall transcend all," reflects the standards that the members set for each other.

"The good thing about our brothers," Johnson said, "is that they're all good at something, and they're not afraid to be themselves. So many of

these other frats, the guys just run with the pack. Ours don't, they just do their best at whatever they can."

The fraternity organizes a number of fund-raising events during the year that they try to make as entertaining as possible. They host a Mom's Day every year, which incorporates a number of bake sales and a fashion show. This is held at the Best Western, and this year, falls on March 5th.

Rehearsals are now underway for a "Step Show," which will be held at J.W. Oysters on March 20th, at which the members will be demonstrating their skill on the dance floor.

At events like these, the members are helped by the "Alpha Angels," a group of black female students who, according to Taylor, work in close proximity with the APAs.

The money raised by the APAs is distributed among several things. The main part of their money goes to cancer prevention, but they also send a certain amount each year to their headquarters in Chicago. From there, it is used to support black colleges throughout the U.S.