



## Chapter Standards Board Guide Summary Overview

**Purpose:** Investigate and hear cases where members fail to meet expectations of membership. May also be a forum for discussion on values and behavior, as well as a mediator of disputes between members.

**Structure:** Three or more members in good standing from different new member classes. In general, every member of the chapter should feel at least one person on Standards would speak on his behalf. Should be comprised of an odd number of members, so there can be no tie votes.

**Governing Documents:** Constitution and Bylaws; Regulations; Triangle Code of Ethics

**Four E's:** Expectations; Education; Encouragement; Enforcement

**What Every Member should do:** Make Grades; Pay Bills; Participate in the Chapter; Behave Responsibly; Replace Yourself.

**Standards and Expectations help prepare our members for life after college,** where every community and employer will have them.

**Process:** Inform; Investigate; Charge; Adjudicate; Sanction; Appeal

**Board Building:** Selection; Training; Review

### Checklist (Annual Process)

- ✓ Appoint/Elect Committee Members
  - Diverse Classes/Interests represented
- ✓ Orientation and Training
  - Utilize College Resources
  - Review Chapter Bylaws and Campus Policies
  - Case Studies
  - Respect the Process
  - Effective Sanctions
  - Documenting Outcomes

## Forward

This Standards Guide is a publication of Triangle Fraternity as a resource to our chapters. It is as titled – a “Guide” – to assist groups to improve their chapter standards processes, both to better educate and inform members of expectations and to address potential incidents or violations. The ideal is a fair, equitable and consistent process to hold members accountable and resolve disputes, and in which members have confidence.

**NOTE: Violations of Federal or State law should be referred to the proper authorities and are not the jurisdiction of chapter Standards boards.** Standards boards may wish to address students who have violated the law with additional educational sanctions or probation, or provide public censure in a way to state clearly those actions are not condoned by the chapter.

Chapters should not feel bound to use this Guide as their only resource. Most campuses have staff who are trained in student or judicial affairs and who may also train university judicial boards. These individuals can be excellent resources for guidance, to review chapter processes and even to assist in the annual training of men serving on the chapter Standards board or committee.

There also are a great many resources online for those who wish to delve deeper into campus judicial processes, campus culture, student affairs or fraternity/sorority life. Those also may prove helpful to groups that wish to improve their own practices.

A detailed reference document created by the Fraternity Executive’s Association and Assn. for Student Conduct Administration is here: <https://app.box.com/s/cwicl9cxwtgh4k51aw8j1npxj36srar6>. This document was created to help colleges and fraternities work together in conduct issues, but delves deeply into the processes outlined in this Guide.

*A Standards board or committee is important to long-term chapter success, as it establishes the basic expectations of chapter membership and then responds to those who fail or choose not to meet them.*

Essential to that function is an understanding that not all violations come from purposeful action contrary to the expectations, but may involve special situations, conditions or influences that caused a violation to occur. It is the process of gathering and understanding all information that provides an ability for a Standards board or committee to evaluate and discuss the situation fairly to determine if sanctions should apply.

Further, we are a part of a larger educational community. As such, we should seek responses that are educational, and which challenge our members to be better men, students and brothers. Each failure to meet expectations also is a teachable moment to allow students the opportunity to learn and grow.

Chapters are encouraged to use this Guide to orient and train students involved in Standards processes and to improve their overall process annually. The result will be the consistent and fair process we need to reinforce expectations and keep the chapter strong and successful.

## I. What are Y/Our Standards?

Every organization dealing with people should have a way to handle disputes and hold its members accountable when there are problems. In Triangle chapters, there are standards boards or committees to accomplish this purpose in a fashion that ensures due process.

The first step in any good standards process is to have some (standards). Triangle governing documents – the **Constitution & Bylaws** and **Regulations** – are a good place to start as they expect many things from membership in Triangle and outline the processes necessary in cases of suspension or expulsion of members. These documents tend to be more specific or quantified – minimum GPA, approved courses, risk management policies, etc.

In addition, the **Triangle Code of Ethics** provides a guideline for proper values for individuals and within a chapter. The Ethics leave some room for chapters to determine their application, based on the specific chapter or campus. These core documents should be the foundation of any standards process.

## II. The Four E's

The entire process of motivating to the positive and responding to the negative can be outlined simply in what we call the Four E's. Use these to build your program...

1. **Expectations** – Have clear expectations for what is needed for member and chapter success. Basically, there are five things every member should do to make his chapter stronger:

- Make your grades (creditable scholastic record)
- Pay your bills (pay promptly; live within your means)
- Participate in Chapter life (preserve and promote)
- Behave responsibly (maintain self-respect by proper conduct)
- Replace yourself before you leave (preserve and promote)

There are a lot of paragraphs in Triangle's governing documents, but these are the basics every member needs to be doing and they are vital to the long-term success of every chapter.

2. **Education** – Educate and explain to all members why these expectations are necessary. Most should be obvious – if you don't pay your bills, the chapter goes over budget or can't provide events or services needed. If members don't replace themselves, the chapter slowly dies out. Some chapters incorporate these expectations into a membership agreement all members sign before initiation or on an annual basis.

You should have the conversation each year to make sure expectations are understood and supported. Ultimately, members will support expectations if they feel they've had a voice or when they believe they are fair or necessary to long-term chapter success.

3. **Encouragement** – Guys respond much better to recognition and reward than to punishment. You should regularly encourage positive performance by recognizing members publicly who do good things for the chapter. It doesn't need to be flashy or expensive – think of stickers on football helmets for tackles or receptions. Sometimes just saying thank you during a chapter meeting for

strong academic performance, great event management or making the extra effort on the house improvement weekend makes a big difference. Honor among one's peers is significant.

Some chapters have more elaborate points systems that provide points for supporting the chapter – go back to the five essentials of membership above. Points for paying bills on time, living in the house, being an officer, bringing a new member into the chapter, etc. can be the driving force to get guys excited about things that help you succeed. Post the standings each month so those at the top can shine and those lower down recognize the need to step it up.

4. **Enforcement** – Regardless of how much you try, there will be members who simply can't or won't meet your expectations, despite understanding them. Maybe you didn't make expectations clear during new member education and now they are shocked they are expected to work for and support the chapter. Perhaps they are guys who only care about themselves and what they can **get** from the chapter, rather than **give**. Whatever the reason, you will need to respond in some way to enforce your expectations – and the standards committee is the vehicle to do that.

To be clear, we're not talking about guys having difficulty. For instance, a man who is finding it difficult to pay his chapter bills but wants to participate and is a good and contributing member in every other way, can go to the finance committee to work out a payment plan or seek other options. Enforcement is necessary when members choose not to meet expectations or think they shouldn't have to.

### III. Why are Standards Necessary?

It's common in the fraternity world to mention the 20/20/60 rule. This rule says 20% of your membership is the best and brightest on campus – your examples to parents and administrators. Twenty percent are men who maybe should not have been admitted to college, much less to Triangle. And the other 60% will simply follow the 20% that looks the most fun.

These percentages are different for every chapter, but all chapters have men who are motivated, men who don't do anything, and a lot of guys in the middle. Standards are necessary, so each member knows what is expected of them. They may choose not to live up to those expectations, but if they do, they should know there are consequences. Standards boards exist to hold those men accountable. If the chapter takes no action for member failure to meet standards, more men might choose to follow that path and the chapter could fail.

In addition, on a broader scale, we're helping our members prepare for life after college. Every community and employer will have standards and expectations. We do our members no service if we allow them to ignore expectations with no penalty. We hold them accountable to paying bills, because no landlord, phone company or car lease is going to let them slide later in life. In that way, we're setting them up for success rather than failure.

It is said that 80% or more of habits men keep throughout life are hardened in college. Our standards boards can help make sure they are habits for success, not failure.

#### IV. Student Judicial Principles/Terminology

Student conduct administration is an educational endeavor. Therefore, the language of student conduct administrators and codes of student conduct, is intended to reflect the voice of student development as a primary underpinning of the profession. Commonly used student conduct phrases include:

- Conduct (vs. discipline)
- Fundamental fairness (vs. due process)
- Complainant and Respondent (vs. Prosecutor and Defendant)
- Meeting or hearing (vs. trial)
- Hearing panel (vs. tribunal)
- Preponderance of the evidence (vs. beyond a reasonable doubt)
- Responsible or Not Responsible (vs. Guilty or Not Guilty)
- Assigned (vs. imposed)
- Sanctions or outcomes (vs. sentence or penalties)

Notice the standard of proof is a **preponderance of evidence** – “Is it more likely the violation occurred than not?” – versus beyond a reasonable doubt. This isn’t criminal or civil law and the sanctions are not as serious. Therefore, a lighter standard of proof is allowable.

#### V. The Standards Process

Most standards processes follow the same approximate outline, once an allegation is made or activity comes to the attention of the group.

- 1) **Inform** the Member – Let the individual or individuals accused of a violation know.
- 2) **Investigate** the Accusations – Get the information necessary for the board or committee to confirm a violation has occurred. If there is sufficient evidence...
- 3) **Charge** the Member with the specific violations of specific policies or standards.
- 4) **Adjudicate** – Hold a hearing to allow the Member to understand the charges, learn the evidence and respond. If the individual is found guilty then...
- 5) **Sanction** – Design sanctions to address the behavior, reimburse for damages and/or educate to prevent future problems.
- 6) **Appeal** – There should always be an appeal process if individuals feel they were not treated fairly.

The Standards Chairman should be well-versed in the process, as a failure to abide by the approved process is the most common reason for appeal. Standards board/committee members also must understand the process and their obligations within. Further, members will value a process they feel is fair and allows all sides to be heard. Here are ideas for each of the five process steps.

##### 1. Inform the Member

In a chapter situation, it’s usually pretty easy to meet with the member face to face or contact them via phone. Person to person is preferred to an email or text. Some chapters use a chapter meeting to “call” members to Standards. That may help to advertise to others the Standards Board is doing work but may also result in undue embarrassment to members who may turn out to be innocent of allegations.

Ideally, it is recommended the Standards Chair contact the individual directly to let him know about the allegations and to get his explanation of what happened. This should allow you to gather enough

information to determine whether there are merits to the allegations. This is not a chance to debate the charges – he will have the chance to do that at the hearing. It is a chance to gather information on the allegations and attempt to determine how the investigation should move forward.

## **2. Investigate the Allegations**

Chapters can use their discretion as to the best way to investigate allegations, but they should include a couple safeguards...

- 1) Interviews with students should be confidential. This is not a hearing, it's an investigation. Information shared is private until the time it needs to be shared with others in a hearing. You may find out at the end of interviews that there really isn't enough evidence to pursue the case. In that situation, you don't want a lot of evidence in public that might muddy that decision. Further, you can create conflicts within the chapter if it's obvious who is alleging violations against whom.
- 2) Document the process. Take notes, record dates and times, get names of additional witnesses or participants, etc. The more complete your documentation, the better resource for the eventual hearing or dismissal and the better your evidence that your process was fair and complete. If you wish, you can destroy the notes once the case is finalized, but until then notes will be very helpful.

The investigation should include anyone who was present or witnessed the event and may have information or an opinion on what happened. It's important to note what is fact and what is opinion, so the committee can make good decisions. Facts are important to confirm the event or injury, but opinions can be helpful in understanding why something may have happened, or what the mindset of the accused student may have been.

If, after discussion with all relevant parties and witnesses leads to the need for a hearing, you should be ready for the next step...

## **3. Charge the Member**

The charging process serves two purposes: 1) it confirms a hearing is necessary and provides notice of the time and place of the hearing, or the process that will be used to determine that, and 2) it lays out the specific charges, so the student may build his defense. Knowing the charges and having a chance to defend oneself is an essential part of due process.

This step should be documented in writing, either by a hard-copy letter or detailed email. Charges should relate to specific expectations that are documented somewhere. You can't just say a member didn't live up to expectations, you must state the violation of a specific expectation, such as:

Violation of Triangle Ethic #4 to "Pay all personal bills promptly" by failure to pay chapter dues and fees for three consecutive months, or...

Violation of Triangle Risk Management Policies as outlined in Triangle Regulation 3.6.1. d. by the provision of alcohol to a minor during an event at the chapter house.

In this way, you limit the defense to whether or not the action occurred, not the relative merits of the policy in violation. It also serves to strengthen and reinforce the actual policies (Ethics, Bylaws, Regulations, etc.) that are the basis of chapter operations. You also can include local chapter bylaws or rules that have been established.

#### **4. Adjudicate**

The hearing is the venue to put everything in front of the Standards board. This is where the charges should be read, the student is allowed to respond, and all evidence and witnesses are presented in a forum designed to reveal the truth. The usual format is as follows:

- 1) Call to Order
- 2) Charges are Read
- 3) Member States his Plea (guilty or not-guilty)
- 4) Evidence is Provided to Support the Charges – documents, witnesses, Q&A, etc.
- 5) Evidence is Provided to Defend the Member – documents, witnesses, Q&A, etc.
- 6) Adjourn to Closed Session for Standards Board to determine verdict and preferred range of sanctions, if verdict is guilty.
- 7) Announcement of Verdict

The process can be as formal as you like but must have decorum. The chairman should run the hearing, guiding the conversations and assuring everyone involved has the ability to contribute their evidence. It's similar to a good chapter meeting where the president controls the floor and coordinates the presentation of reports and items of business.

Keep in mind, this is a central part of the process, so if you fail to keep order, refuse to allow evidence, or in other ways undermine the process, it is a good probability that there will be an appeal if the final decision is disagreeable to the member or to the chapter. Your only charge is to determine whether or not the accused has violated a specific standard. This is not a judgement of him as a person or student.

Sometimes Standards board members find difficulty in passing judgement on someone who does something dumb, because we've all done something dumb in our lives. Or they confuse guilt of being a bad brother with being a bad person. We have much higher standards for Triangle members than for the average college student. Stay focused on the issue... did the accused violate the standard?

Confidence in the verdict is inspired by confidence in the process. Train your board to understand and follow the process and you'll have better overall results. Have the college judicial board coordinator work with you. Consider including an alumnus advisor or representative to sit in on hearings. These things help insure your process is sound and can be a good way to provide consistency as boards change membership.

#### **5. Sanction**

If the verdict of the Board is guilty, the next step is to develop sanctions. Sanctions should meet three needs:

- 1) They should fit the violation
- 2) Be meaningful to the member and encourage learning or growth
- 3) Should consider the abilities or limitations of the member

There is little to be gained in levying a sanction that is too harsh for the violation or one that is beyond the abilities of the member to accomplish. Sanctions should be fair and may be challenging, but the goal is to reinforce standards and educate the student to think differently if the same situation arises again.

Standards board members should know the member as well as anyone in the chapter and can use that knowledge to come up with sanctions that will meet the three needs. For some students a financial sanction will be meaningful; for others, they'd rather write a quick check than do anything difficult. For some, a public apology to the chapter will be more challenging than doing work around the house or extra community service. It's up to your board to consider all this when creating sanctions.

You may have set specific penalties or fines for certain violations and that's okay. But leave the door open to also add on something educational or that may help the rest of the chapter understand the impact of the violations. Research and a report to the chapter on the law or college policies may make some members aware of expectations they didn't know about or may help them understand why that expectation is important to chapter success. Think how you can use a violation to better educate the larger chapter membership.

## **6. Appeal**

Any fair standards process must include a way to appeal the verdict or sanctions. There are three common justifications for an appeal: a) failure to follow procedure; b) significant new evidence that might have changed the findings of the committee or; c) sanctions that do not fit the violation.

Should any of these justifications apply to the situation, the member may request an appeal. Appeals normally are heard by the chapter or by a board designated by the President to include an alumnus and two members not members of the Standards Board. The focus is only on the reason for appeal; this is not a new hearing.

If it is found the reasons for appeal are valid, the incident is referred back to the standards board to consider whether a new hearing is necessary or simply a modification of the sanctions. This is an opportunity for the board to learn as well, so to improve their process in future. If it is judged that an appeal is not warranted, the appeal process is over and the sanctions go into effect.

## **VI. Violations**

There are a wide variety of violations that can be addressed by the Standards Board, but boards should keep their focus on violations of the expectations of membership. These boards are not civil or criminal courts, nor should they address violations of the Student Code unless there have been repercussions against the chapter as a result. Standards boards exist to address violations of chapter or Triangle standards. There are other vehicles for broader violations.

That said, there may be times when member actions will involve standards processes from both the chapter and the college. For instance, a member who consumes alcohol while a minor, at a chapter event, where he also provides alcohol to a minor female student, might receive a ticket from local police and a referral to a campus judicial process, as well as a call to chapter standards because he caused the chapter to receive a risk management violation from the university and/or Triangle.



In one action, he has violated state law, the university code of conduct and Triangle's risk management policies and caused the chapter to receive penalties. It's very likely he could be involved with three different processes. But the chapter standards board can certainly take into effect any sanctions already levied by other boards as they consider their own sanctions – and the sanctions they settle upon might be directed at helping to educate the chapter as much as the individual – something the other two boards may not consider.

Each chapter should consider a list of the most common situations they might encounter and discuss each of those during the training process for your standards board. Training should occur annually as new members are appointed to the board. It's an opportunity to understand the process, but also clarify what is worthy of action and what might be more appropriately handled person to person.

Misuse/abuse of alcohol or other controlled substances, violence, harassment or assault toward others, failure to pay chapter fees or dues, damage to property, fraud or theft are more serious issues common on college campuses. But standards boards also should be concerned with members with low GPA, men who fail to participate in the chapter, or those who cause conflict between members.

#### **Potential Violations in Chapters/Student Organizations**

- Failure to pay dues/fees in a timely manner
- Lack of Attendance at Chapter meetings
- Lack of Attendance at Chapter events
- Failure to attend required events (recruitment, study, intramural, NM, etc.)
- Low academic performance
- Disorderly Conduct / Rude or Inappropriate Behavior
- Damage to chapter property or rental property
- Disputes among members (personal, financial, etc.)
- Mismanagement of organization funds
- Harassing or Hazing behavior
- Any violation of university or fraternity policies

#### **VII. Sanctions**

Similarly, sanctions should be correct for the chapter and campus community. Good sanctions fit the level of violation, are meaningful to the individual and have the ability to teach or change the member for the positive. They should help the member understand why their actions were incorrect and guide them toward different decisions in future, should they find themselves in a similar situation.

You will know your members best, so should be able to find sanctions to fit the expectations above. Keep in mind the things that motivate rather than simply penalize and try to find options that may be difficult but will have the intended impact.

For instance, some members would rather be fined and pay a quick check for damage to property. But it may be better for the student to be responsible for repairing the damage, under the watchful eye of the house manager to make sure it is repaired to code. If the student has the skills to make repairs, that experience and potential pride in making the repair may very well make him less likely to do damage in future. Writing a check is convenient but doing work can be transforming.

If the result of a chapter event is an alcohol transport of a guest, should the member responsible for inviting the guest or providing the alcohol consumed also be responsible to reimburse the guest for any medical costs and apologizing to the parent/s? How would that sanction affect the way members think about their responsibility to take care of guests at events?

Sanctions should be discussed carefully for each hearing when members are found responsible for violations. A good standards board will work to find sanctions that fit the violation and make the member a better person.

### **Potential Sanctions in Chapters/Student Organizations**

- Public apology – at a meeting or event
- Research and reporting on the violation and its implications
- Fines or community service hours/dollars
- Work around the chapter house – repairing damage, cleaning or improving
- Reimbursement of costs, losses or damage done
- Probationary period including sanctions to be completed to reinstate
- Temporary Suspension from some or all benefits of membership
- Full Suspension from the chapter and/or Triangle

### **VIII. Good luck!**

Our hope is you will use this guide to improve your current Standards program. Clear expectations and a process for holding members accountable will, over time, decrease problems and help insure a stable and strong chapter for the future.

Use the resources available to you – campus, alumni and HQ – to build and maintain a strong Standards board. You will find it a great help when you have members who need extra guidance to live Triangle's Code of Ethics and, as last resort, to remove those from membership who cannot or will not commit themselves to that Code.