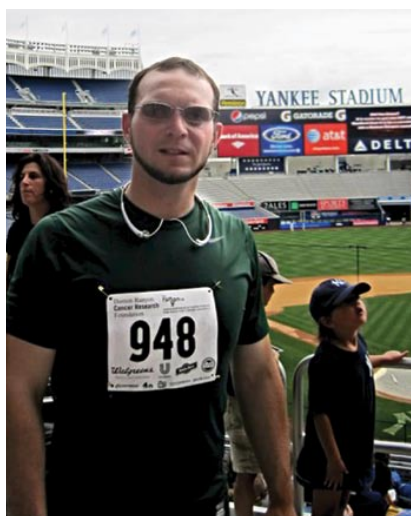




Fraternity life through the lens of a long-distance run

By TYLER HAVENS, SUNY-Fredonia '03

I hadn't been living the Balanced Man Ideal since graduation. I was challenged to complete a half-marathon in May. During nine months of training, I would lose myself in thought instead of music. As a fraternity/sorority advisor, I would ponder my work. Running a race became a metaphor for the journey of fraternal life for me.



Havens recently participated in the Damon Runyon 5k through Yankee Stadium for Cancer Research. His training for a half-marathon sparked the idea that a fraternal journey has much in common with the phases of a long race.

Facing new challenges

Just the thought of running 13.1 miles was new, exciting, and scary. I knew it would take time and dedication to accomplish. The same is true for joining a fraternity. Students can see that fraternity members commit time and effort to bond with unfamiliar people, which is new, exciting, and scary.

Real commitment

Though I had been training since early August, I didn't sign up for the half-marathon until late January. Students interested in joining a fraternity may also hesitate during the recruitment process.

Potential new members are grappling with a commitment, making sure this is something they truly want. They have watched from the sidelines, similar to spectators at a race, and are inspired to become a part of the "main event."

Dealing with change

Less than two weeks away from the race, my nerves started to kick in. Even though I ran over 10 miles on several occasions and hit the 13-mile mark several times, I knew how my body reacted to pace, terrain, and weather. I knew I could go the distance, but I had run solo so far. This training experience mirrors the new member process. New members have six to eight weeks to learn how to navigate a new world: learning to balance class, work, new member education, chapter meetings, chapter events, meeting other new members, and of course, fun.

Making it happen every day

I had regularly been running at least five miles twice a week. My body was ready for the first five miles of the race no matter who was looking on. This is the remainder of your undergraduate time. The recruitment process (commitment) and the new member education process (training) have prepared you to represent SigEp. You have learned, espoused, and sworn an oath to live the values of your organization in your everyday life. That effort and the observation of positive role models have prepared you to lead your organizations into the future, as well as lay the ground work for others to come after you and make your alumni proud.

Lifelong learning

Though I could easily run five miles, I still had over eight to go, even though my body was ready to quit. Those last eight miles reflect your time as an alumnus. You can easily choose not to be involved after your undergraduate years (i.e. quit after five miles).

You will see fulfillment from staying engaged in some form. You could serve in a volunteer role, as SigEp succeeds not only because of the Headquarters staff and the undergraduate members,



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but also because of our volunteers. Serve as a member of a local Alumni and Volunteer Corporation (AVC), an advisor or mentor to a local chapter. You could choose to work with or for SigEp Headquarters. Or you can donate to your local chapter, the Sigma Phi Epsilon Educational Foundation, or your institution. These gifts will translate into scholarships, activities, or equipment needed to make the experience of another student just as significant as it was for you.

Fraternity life is not a sprint, it is a half marathon. The rest of my life as a fraternity man will be those last eight miles. I'll

cross the finish line when I reach chapter eternal. As you are completing the first five miles of your fraternal marathon, start thinking about your last eight miles and how you can contribute to SigEp to live up to your oath of obligation beyond your undergraduate years.