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# COLLEGIATE PANHELLENIC COUNCIL

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GEORGIA TECH™

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## Run for the Roses: The Bigger Picture

### I. Opening Statement

To the members of the Collegiate Panhellenic Council:

This statement has been authored by the Collegiate Panhellenic Council (CPC) Executive Board to clearly affirm our community's values and dedication to advocacy. We realize that Run for the Roses has been a topic of conversation since last semester, which is why we wanted to directly communicate what we have heard from members within our community and from external stakeholders. Since the event is not usually planned until June or July, we did not initially have the capacity to think about or plan the event this semester; however, we began to hear many rumors about the event and received questions from community members, so we wanted to provide the concrete reasoning for this change.

As many of you know, the 2021 Collegiate Panhellenic Council authored a [List of Demands](#) to the Interfraternity Council (IFC) regarding sexual violence in our Greek communities, which served as a call to action for fraternities. In this letter, our community also made a commitment to creating cultural change in Fraternity and Sorority Life.

*“In addition to the above-mentioned list, our community is also prepared to examine the cultural norms and traditions in our own community that actively perpetuate harmful messages to our newest members including, but not limited to, Run for the Roses.”*

- CPC List of Demands to IFC

We want this letter to be an opportunity to communicate multiple perspectives of this event from people who may not be comfortable speaking up on their own and those in our broader community. In this letter we will explain **why** the event Run for the Roses has been re-evaluated and changed.

We have included quotes from a variety of people. For their privacy, we have left out their names and occasionally their chapter at their request.

All we ask is for the letter to be read with an open mind so that you can use this position statement to come to your own individual opinion.

Due to the length of the letter, below are hyperlinks to the different sections.

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## **II. Changes Needed in our Greek Communities**

Around the country, many colleges and universities are experiencing pushback against fraternity and sorority life and campaigns by students for its [removal](#). These campaigns have started because of the exclusive and unsafe environments that fraternity & sorority communities have cultivated and fostered. Georgia Tech has not seen this campaign on our campus **yet**, but a refusal to reflect on our practices and adhere to the true values of our organizations has the potential to spark similar events. Simply stated, if we do not evaluate and alter our “traditions,” our organizations could cease to exist in our ever changing world. Especially without the support of external stakeholders, fraternity & sorority life is not sustainable. The work of council executive boards, chapter leadership, and outstanding members within our communities has been and continues to be for the continuation of Georgia Tech’s fraternity and sorority life.

We understand that change can be uncomfortable and scary; however, it is necessary for the evolution and improvement of our community. Our goal is to promote positive growth of Georgia Tech’s Greek community and we have deemed the alterations to this event as necessary in fostering a more inclusive culture.

## **III. The Event’s Value to our Community**

Run for the Roses has brought value to our community and the new member experience. We know that this beloved event has a lot to offer, which we hope to maintain as we make alterations

to the event structure. As many of you have voiced, this event is fun and memorable for the IFC and CPC community experience at Georgia Tech, which is why we want to restructure Run for the Roses so that **all** members of our community are able, comfortable, and excited to participate.

#### **IV. Necessary Cultural Changes**

As discussed in Section II, cultural changes are slow and uncomfortable.

*“As I did research on the history of Run for the Roses, I got the opportunity to speak with the CPC Presidents from 2013 and 2014. My biggest takeaway from our conversation was their perspective on how change in the CPC and IFC communities has always been met with significant pushback. They told me about their efforts to change CPC’s involvement in IFC formal recruitment almost a decade ago, and they shared that this change was also met with outrage from the community. People claimed that this change would be the downfall or end of Greek Life at Georgia Tech. This was almost 10 years ago. Now, CPC members not attending IFC recruitment is the norm for us, just as our alternative for new member programming will be the norm in just a few years. As strange as it may seem now, there will be a time when future members of our community have no recollection of the previous format of this event, and that is a natural part of what positive change looks like in Fraternity & Sorority Life.”*

- Izzy Evans, Collegiate Panhellenic Council President

While Run for the Roses brings value, it also raises significant concern both within our community and from an external perspective. Perhaps these concerns are not ones that you personally have, but advocating for **all** members and amplifying these issues is the role of council leadership.

#### *Safety:*

The first major concern that is often mentioned is safety for those who are participating and for those who just happen to be walking on campus.

*“Run for the Roses has definitely proven itself to be dangerous, with multiple injuries within my own chapter each year. It also causes girls to push themselves past their limits which has resulted in asthma attacks and falls, all of which could be avoided.”*

- Member of the CPC Community

Every year, we see numerous members from every chapter receive injuries ranging from small cuts and bruises to broken arms and legs that result in trips to the Emergency Room. CPC has worked with Georgia Tech to help improve safety measures, yet we see this issue every year, and the competitive culture surrounding Run for the Roses has only increased the number of injuries.

*“I was unsure if I would be able to help carry runners back to our house alone, so I asked my chapter to allow for me to bring my boyfriend to help me carry potentially injured women if needed. Looking back, the fact that I felt the need to have him there says a lot about the expected injuries from this event.”*

- Member of the CPC Community

While we have heard the suggestion to rebrand as “Walk for the Roses”, we have advised members to walk every year and yet, every year, members continue to run. We want fraternity and sorority life to be noticeable and present on campus, but not disruptive. Georgia Tech’s administration has been very clear about how this event makes our community, within the first week of the new school year, look to anyone observing fraternity and sorority life from the outside.

Further, while participating in this event, we often do not see the mayhem it can cause for someone who is not involved. We are taking over sidewalks, blocking streets off, and could be forcing people to walk in the streets just to go about their daily lives. There have been many times where students are walking in the same direction and are then suddenly being overwhelmed by a large group of sorority women coming at them at top speed. This is disorienting and could potentially trigger a fear response from these students, especially those who are extremely unfamiliar with fraternity and sorority life.

During the first week of a new school year, Georgia Tech’s administration and the Georgia Tech Police Department must prepare for around 1500 sorority members to be running around campus, crossing streets without looking, taking up the sidewalks, and potentially needing medical attention. This adds a significant burden to Georgia Tech resources during an already busy time of year. On top of this, participants blatantly disobey direct instructions from GTPD. It is critical that our community maintains a positive relationship with Georgia Tech, as they enable the continuation of our organizations.

*“I spoke with Dean of Students John Stein, and he informed me that members of Georgia Tech administration fully recommend and wholeheartedly support changing Run for the Roses. This event has been a hot topic of conversation for the administration **every year for over a decade**. He informed me that there have been conversations about shutting down this event at an institutional level for many years, but they wanted the CPC and IFC communities to champion positive change on their own. We should be thankful that they are providing us the opportunity to have conversations about access and inclusivity in our communities, rather than canceling this event without any student voice or understanding.”*

- Izzy Evans, Collegiate Panhellenic Council President

*External Impression:*

As previously mentioned, fraternity and sorority life at large already faces many judgements and stereotypes, and this event reinforces such opinions. As we run around campus during the first week of school with no regard for anyone else's space, imagine the opinions that will be formed from people outside of our community. It is inconsiderate to trample fellow students going to class, going to dinner, or coming back from work. Additionally, imagine being a student who could not join one of our chapters due to the financial burden and time commitment required to join our communities, or someone who was released from recruitment. We must realize that we should take great care to respect our external impressions and remember those who are eligible for Continuous Open Bidding. In order to encourage the growth of our community on this campus, external outlook is important. Further, out of respect for the greater Georgia Tech community, it is critical that we have a positive relationship with others on campus.

While we take pride in our new members, it is important to consider the manner in which we flaunt them on campus. Having them sprint around in nice clothes to be presented to fraternities gives the impression that we place a large value on physical appearance. The second major impression comes from the older members following behind drinking. It portrays a heavier focus on the alcohol aspect than the new member introductions.

We have also heard the opinions of other communities on campus. This semester, there was a summit organized where the leadership of the four Greek councils met and discussed our operations and goals. One of the first questions that we received from leadership of the National Pan-Hellenic Council and Multicultural Panhellenic Council was about Run for the Roses. Once we explained it to them, the responses were not intrigued or excited but more confused, apathetic, and rightfully judgemental. Even our fellow members of Greek Life find this event questionable and unenticing.

A way that our community frames this event is under the guise of tradition. In 2016 and 2017, the Greek community assembled a Task Force to evaluate the current status of the Fraternity and Sorority community at Georgia Tech. The Task Force interviewed and hosted focus groups for 177 people over the course of many months, and the following quotes show how community members, as well as internal and external stakeholders, have been discussing the problems with this event for many, many years. In reference to both Run for the Roses and Wet Weekend, the Task Force Student Comments states:

*These events feature increased alcohol consumption, physical activities, and risk taking. Events of this nature are meant to be celebratory and are public. Therefore, many who are not knowledgeable about the fraternity/sorority community at times only have a view of intoxicated students running through campus, or holding extravagant events on their front lawn. **These events are also couched in the language of “traditions” which only muddies the expectation for actual traditions at Georgia Tech.***

- Task Force Student Comments

#### *Alcohol:*

Additionally, it is well known that the containers the older members are carrying around are often filled with alcohol. As this is the first community event after Bid Day, it could reflect to our newest members that a major value of our community is alcohol consumption. Many older members (even those who are underage) have taken an opportunity for new member bonding and turned it into an alcohol-focused “tradition.” To a greater extent, because this event involves physical activity, coordination, and the need to safely cross roads, drinking can be very dangerous. Similar to the urging of walking, all Executive Boards have continuously discouraged drinking, but this has been routinely ignored, as it is often portrayed as the purpose of the event for older members.

While this may seem hypocritical, as we acknowledge that many other CPC and IFC events include alcohol consumption, it is important to remember that Run for the Roses is a **new member event**. Similar to Bid Day, Run for the Roses should not be focused on nor include alcohol. It is important to show our new members that we can have fun as a community and bond while sober, as alcohol is not and should not be a core value of our organizations.

On the fraternity end, they have an advantage of being in a set location and having access to refills. This makes it very dangerous for the fraternity members who sit on roofs or out windows. It is common knowledge that new fraternity members are encouraged to drink to “be confident.” This is often the first time some of these underage fraternity members have had free and continuous access to alcohol, and they are now feeling peer pressured to drink and perform in front of sorority members.

#### *Hazing/Peer Pressure:*

As we alluded to above, peer pressure and coercion play an unspoken role in this event. For sororities, some chapters have members fill out excuse forms if they can not go which implies that you must have a valid reason to not participate and that simply not wanting to is not good enough. Further, there is talk from older members of “well it is not required but EVERYONE does it.” While it may not be outright stated, this event is most often perceived as required to a new member, one who may not have understanding or confidence to speak up against implicit peer pressure. In February, CPC exec released a form to solicit constructive ideas for a new event. Instead of tangible ideas, we received multiple comments stating that we should “just make the

event optional." Reading a multitude of those comments proved that, to the general member, this is not an optional event, even though it has never been required.

In terms of fraternities, some new members are told to skip class the Wednesday before Run for the Roses to learn their routines. Being a student at Georgia Tech should always come first, and the encouragement to put their fraternity above class within the first week of joining does not reflect the values of our community.

*By implying or explicitly stating that this event is not optional, especially when it includes the potential of personal discomfort and sometimes alcohol consumption, it can quickly cross into the territory of hazing. We know that this may not be every member's experience, but if even one member feels uncomfortable or coerced, it is one too many.*

*Access and Inclusion:*

Equally as important as safety and hazing issues is the accessibility and inclusivity of an event that is supposed to welcome and introduce our newest members. A member who is not physically able, due to reasons such as, but not limited to, asthma, fainting disorders, wheelchair/crutches accessibility, etc, would not be able to have the same experience as others. There are also invisible disabilities that are not immediately apparent. It once again would single them out and potentially give them the impression that they do not belong in our community.

*"I have an invisible physical disability, I never felt comfortable asking for accommodations, fearing that I would be separated into a different category. I felt unseen and not cared for throughout the entire event. No one said anything negative to me for not running to the houses, but that is the whole point: no one said anything to me at all. I was left completely in the dark by upperclassmen and blindly followed the group, and because of this, I ended the evening feeling excluded. To add insult to injury, at the house after and later amongst other Greek women there was a constant comparison of how many roses we all got, as if that is what mattered the most about the evening and not the amazing people that you had the opportunity to meet."*

- Member of Alpha Chi Omega

This includes a variety of mental illnesses. If someone has social anxiety or a lower comfort level when it comes to being what many may perceive as "fun and silly," this event may make them feel like being in the CPC or IFC communities is accessible or accommodating for them. While it has been said that they could just not participate, this is not always true for reasons stated above. Further, not participating in the first new member event due to a disability may leave them feeling singled out because of an aspect out of their control.

*"I was not comfortable going up to a certain chapter since I had a serious issue with one of their new members, and instead of asking why I was in the back quietly with my big, one of the fourth years came up to me and screamed about how disrespectful I was*

*being by not participating. It was very public and very uncomfortable. I ended up dropping soon after.”*

- Former CPC community member

Those who may not be in shape, not size dependent, may also feel self-conscious about their abilities and natural bodily reactions to exertion such as sweat and heavy breathing. They are now also being forced to choose between being behind their member class or doing something they may not be capable of or comfortable with. The same can be said for someone who is uncomfortable with their body type. If they are not able to keep up or are sweating more than the others in their members class, it has the potential to cause mental distress.

*“I am from a colder dry climate and was not used to the Atlanta heat and humidity which combined with the running made me sweat... a lot. I was so so close to restarting my eating disorder because looking around I felt like no one was having the same issue so it must be because I was not small enough or in shape enough, luckily I was still seeing my therapist and was able to stop those thoughts.”*

- Member of Zeta Tau Alpha

#### *Competitive Culture:*

Every year, fraternities do purchase more roses than necessary yet, every year, there are still members who will run away from houses without roses. The sorority members are told to line up in front of fraternity members and, knowing the trend that not everyone will receive a rose, there is a strong implication that members must compete with each other for the fraternity member's attention. This immediately gives the impression that their attention is more important than the sisterly bond they joined their organization for, just days ago. Fraternal relations cannot and should not be more important than the creating a bond between our new sorority members. Some fraternities even have a portion of their routine include a sorority member (examples include a turn, a hand hold, point, etc) which gives the men an opportunity to act on their implicit biases towards conventionally attractive sorority members, further excluding others. This point is further emphasized later when the fraternity member gets to reward the sorority member for their performance with picking to whom they give roses. Some fraternities are trying to combat this, but that does not undo the damage of being sized up and compared to your other brand new sisters.

*“At one of the frats, I watched the man look both me and the girl next to me up and down and then hand the rose to me. It felt so weird and like we were being presented to him for his choice. This was not my experience at every house, but that time definitely left its mark.”*

- Member of Alpha Delta Pi

*“I still remember which woman was pushing others to get to the front. She was*



*encouraged to do whatever it took to get the men's attention even if it meant unhealthy competition amongst ourselves."*

*- Member of Phi Mu*

*"Throughout my childhood, I was always a competitive person. The way it was phrased to me by older members was that I was supposed to get as many roses as possible, so I was sprinting as fast as I could to get to each house. With my competitive nature, I was blinded by the idea that the goal was to fight for roses, and I remember at multiple houses where I fought to be the first to grab the rose over someone in my new member class. As an out of state student, I did not know anyone in my new member class or in any of the fraternities, and my competitive nature was definitely a first impression for many. Looking back, I wish the perspective was different and I had been able to bond with my new member class in a way where I didn't feel like I had to be the best, but just that I could be me. Maybe that would have made me feel more comfortable in a new environment."*

*- Member of Alpha Delta Pi*

#### *Heteronormativity:*

As fraternity and sorority life is currently making strides to be more inclusive to LGBTQIA+ members, we need to look in the mirror and realize that fraternity and sorority life was built for heterosexual, cisgender people. Run for the Roses is a heteronormative event that could leave many members uncomfortable and afraid to speak up. The dress code for sororities may not always be explicitly stated, but it is often the norm for sorority members to wear short sundresses. Not all members of sororities prefer or feel comfortable dressing in a stereotypically feminine manner, especially while participating in physical activity and being observed by many members of both the fraternity and sorority communities. They are then once again forced to make the choice to stand out from their member class or be forced to wear something that causes discomfort. Additionally, we are promoting sororities, which are often majority straight cis women, sprint around and present themselves in front of fraternities, which are often majority straight cis men. They then perform a song and the man gives the women a rose. This can imply that straight relationships are the expectation and norm within our community. This event has the potential to be revamped to promote socialization between fraternities and sororities on a friendly level.

**\*Trigger Warning S/A ([click here to skip](#)) \***

A very blunt way to look at the underlying, subtle implications of Run for the Roses is that men are to expect attention when they are providing an item. For Run for the Roses it is a rose, but during other times it could be alcohol, access to a party or a fraternity event, or even physical or emotional attention. Before continuing, it is important to acknowledge that **this event is not the direct cause of sexual violence**, the cause is rather **solely on the aggressor**; however, it is also important to acknowledge that Greek women are 74% more likely to experience sexual assault than non-Greek collegiate [women](#). Further, the term “Red Zone” refers to the period from August to November where 50% of sexual assaults on college campuses occur and where first-year women are the most [vulnerable](#). Because of these facts, we need to do everything in our power to continue to make our communities safer.

*“Fraternities and sororities need to observe the structure of their social gatherings and prioritize the safety and health of their brothers and sisters at every one of their events.”*

- *Students 4 Social Change*

When looking at Run for the Roses from an outside lens it is easy to see that giving members the right to pick and choose who gets a rose creates power dynamic and a sense of entitlement to that member's attention.

Sexual violence is power-based violence, and while this event does not cause sexual assault, it does implicitly give fraternity members another opportunity to have power over sorority members. They get to choose who they give the rose to, or who they pull up to be part of the dance. While there are lots of other power imbalances within our fraternity and sorority communities and everyday lives that still need to change, we must evaluate the things we revere as “traditions,” and see how they can be altered to foster a beneficial culture shift. Each small change has the opportunity to leave a lasting impact, even if that impact is not immediately observed. If changing Run for the Roses leads to further cultural change, which in turn could lower the way fraternity members implicitly perceive the CPC community, we have an obligation to do so.

In addition the current set up of Run for the Roses allows older fraternity men a direct stage to ‘size up’ our younger and more vulnerable members where they then encourage the younger fraternity members to determine which sorority member class is the “hottest.” While we know this can happen anyway, CPC members should not condone an event that allows fraternities to so easily act on their implicit biases.

*“I went to a fraternity and I watched the brother turn around, take out his note with his number on it, and turn around and give it back to me.”*

- *Member of Alpha Chi Omega*

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## **V. Insight into Alternative**

*Thoughts from Programming Team Thus Far:*

The tentative idea is to hold the main event at the Burger Bowl field. Sororities will still move to all the fraternities with a ‘presentation’ (could still be song/dance but also skit, stand up comedy, etc. whatever the chapter wants). There will be no exchanging roses at the end; instead, the sororities will just move on. We want to remove the concept of sororities being “rewarded” for their performance and, instead, view this as an introduction from each member class. The end will turn into an unstructured gathering including food trucks, music, etc. so members can actually take time to socialize with all the people they just met. The event will also be pushed back a couple weeks to provide more time for new members to become accustomed to campus life and to spread out the beginning of the Fall events. There has been lots of discussion about having multiple events throughout the week to celebrate and socialize with more than just the new members. This is in no way the final or complete plan; there are still many other aspects to consider and plan for.

## **VI. Community Involvement**

While it is unrealistic to have all ~1500 members involved in the planning, it is our mission to give everyone an opportunity to share their ideas along with representation of everyone in the detailed oriented meetings. To accomplish this, we have sent out several surveys since February that have been continuously monitored and have a newer survey hyperlinked at the bottom of this letter. We also have included chapter Presidents in on the rough outline that was created by the programming directors of IFC and CPC, before it was presented at open meeting to give them an opportunity to help us brainstorm solutions to logistics, and to give them a week to allow their chapter execs to talk and bring us back even more feedback. Additionally, as it has been stated, this is a ROUGH outline. There is still time for things to change and for your constructive ideas to be discussed. While we would love to have all of you involved in every detail, it is impossible to do so. We believe that between the feedback forms and chapter representation in our meetings is the best solution to this problem.

## **VII. Conclusion**

While participating in Run for the Roses, most general members are not thinking about the major implications of this event, but it is a symptom of the greater issues within our community. By making seemingly small, albeit intentional, cultural change, we promote an environment of accountability and advocacy, leading to internal reflection and a significant shift in perspective that is needed to keep Fraternity & Sorority Life at Georgia Tech relevant.

If you’ve read this far, thank you. We strongly believe in the right for every member of our community to have transparent, accurate, and complete knowledge of the reasons for decisions

that impact members who will be on campus and active this coming fall. Thank you for the time it took to read this and we would appreciate any constructive feedback you have [here](#).

Lastly, we do want to emphasize that it is okay to be sad or upset that an event that you love is being changed, but it is also important that as a community whose values include respect and inclusivity in all forms, we need to be able to reflect on one another's perspective and come to an understanding and acceptance that there needs to and will be a change to Run for the Roses.

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Please see below for Frequently Asked Questions.

## VIII. Frequently Asked Questions

- A. Can we decide to not change it now?
  - 1. No. As stated in the List in Demands, past and present members of CPC have made a commitment to examining our culture and re-defining what Greek Life can and should be.
- B. Why can't we just ask people to walk?
  - 1. Every single year this is said and encouraged; however, competition and adrenaline kicks in and people always run. Additionally, "run" is in the name of the event which further encourages our new members to run.
- C. Why can't we just buy more roses?
  - 1. The fraternities do buy enough roses for every one of the sorority new members; however there are many issues with the handing out of the roses, whether it is intentional or unintentional.
- D. Can we vote on this?
  - 1. No, the logistics of this event are planned by CPC and IFC council exec. It is equivalent to asking individual sororities execs to have all general members vote on detailed changes to a date night, formal, semi, etc.
  - 2. However, we do want as much input as possible on what you would like to see in this event. If you have any ideas that you would like to share, we would love for you to fill out the feedback form linked in this letter.
- E. What role do chapters have in planning the alternative?
  - 1. We want the new event to make as many people, internally and externally, as happy as possible which is why we have sent out multiple official feedback forms that promote conversation of ideas and constructive criticism.
  - 2. Further, after extensive discussion with IFC, we have shared the thought process on the different potential alternatives and asked for feedback on what they believe their members would want to see.
- F. When will we know what the alternative event is?
  - 1. A rough idea was presented to chapter presidents on 4/5 for the purpose of getting feedback from them and their executive boards. The rough idea (again, these thoughts are in no way finalized) was presented at the CPC Open Meeting on 4/11. It is also included in this letter.
  - 2. However, the final plan with all details will not be finalized until the summer.
- G. What has IFC's involvement been in this decision?
  - 1. The IFC Programming Vice President has been meeting with CPC's Programming Vice President on a consistent basis to help plan the alternative. Please note that this event is typically planned in July. Your council executives have been working incredibly hard on this, on top of the typical responsibilities that they have for the Spring semester.