

## What is a House Director?

A house director is one of the most important and influential positions on the college campus. Few other people in the college community have so many opportunities to influence the lives of young people in various direct ways. The attitudes, habits, values, and standards the house director encourages have an impact that often lasts long after graduation.

Often, people think that the life of the house director, much like the house mother of the 50's, is spent playing bridge and attending parties, teas, and college events. Nothing is further from the truth. Although these activities are a part of the house director's life, he/she is responsible for sharing professional, mature judgment seven days a week for nine or ten months of the year as house manager and role model. The house director also oversees the finances, operation, and atmosphere or ambiance of the house.

Most fraternity and sorority chapters with housing on college campuses have house directors. These student organizations range in size from 25 to 100 or more live-in members. Chapter houses may be owned and operated as private, non-profit corporations, or they may be owned by the university. In some cases the house is owned by the international fraternity or sorority. A landlord owns a property and provides room and board services for the residents, usually comprised of all members of the organization or chapter. Typically, the house has sleeping spaces, public areas, study facilities, dining facilities, a kitchen, a laundry room, and an apartment of one to three rooms for the house director. Some houses have guest bedrooms. The landlord is responsible for owning and operating a residence for the students who are members of the chapter. Room and board may be paid by the chapter or by the individuals living in the home.

House directors are generally employed by the chapter and/or a house corporation board. In the case of university-owned housing, the college itself may do the hiring of house directors. The university fraternity or sorority advisor may assist in recruiting applicants and overseeing the training process.

Student members comprise the chapter, a self-governing organization. Member contracts are an organizational necessity. The landlord(s) should not be involved in chapter governance or activities. The chapter is governed by elected officers and advised by adult advisors, usually alumni/ae of the organization and/or the chapter. There is also usually a campus fraternity/sorority advisor who works with all the chapters primarily through an umbrella governing council. In some cases, the campus fraternity/sorority advisor may work with the house corporation/chapter advisors on a monthly or term basis. In addition, the campus fraternity/sorority advisor also usually makes a point to meet with and communicate with the house directors on a regular basis.

House directors are best described as resident advisors. Generally, they have specific responsibilities for planning menus, ordering food and supplies, supervising the kitchen staff, and administering the commissary budget. However, at least half of the house director's duties are "intangible." He/she is sometimes called upon to advise individual members, officers, or committees regarding personal matters as well as chapter activities. In this respect, house directors must be people who enjoy working with young people, have an ability to listen, and know that although college students generally like to "do their own thing" without excessive adult supervision, they also enjoy the opportunity to have someone around to use as a sounding board. In order to maintain communication in the chapter and to assist in the planning of chapter activities, a weekly meeting between key officers and the house director is recommended. This also helps provide continuity from year to year.

House directors are provided furnished quarters and meals in the chapter house. These quarters are private, but small; apartments are not able to accommodate children, although in a few cases a small pet may be allowed. In addition, the house director may receive benefits or perks that range from a reserved parking spot to an opportunity for professional development. House directors receive regular school holidays as vacation time as well as other weekends that are arranged in advance with the chapter officers and/or advisor. There should be a clear understanding about sick days and overtime.

## What Does a House Director Do?

- Serves as the official chapter host/hostess for planned activities
- Works with the chapter officers and alumni/ae boards to:
  - maintain a clean and hazard-free chapter house
  - make recommendations for major purchases, repairs, and replacements
  - support the chapter officers' enforcement of policies as required by the national organization, the university, the house corporation board, and the undergraduate officers
  - prepare for emergencies of all kinds
  - prevent emergencies whenever possible
- Responds to emergencies as needed
- Serves as a property manager, a listener, a counselor, and an advocate for chapter members
- Supervises the openings and closings of the house during school vacation
- Holds weekly meetings with the chapter officers and an alum advisor
- Informs members of concerns and issues that need to be addressed
- Oversees the kitchen operations which may include:
  - hiring and evaluating personnel (cooks, servers, housekeepers, etc.)
  - planning menus and organizing recipe files, cookbooks, and other resources
  - ordering food
  - ensuring proper preparation, serving, and storage of food
  - maintaining a clean, sanitary kitchen operation
  - managing the food and housekeeping budgets, including petty cash operations

## What are the Qualifications for a Successful House Director?

A successful house director is a patient, qualified, and highly versatile individual. Good health is a necessity, not only because of the duties and the sometimes long, late hours, but also because young people will be less receptive to a tired, complaining house director.

Genuine affection for youth, which is reflected in tolerance, parental concern for each individual, sympathy for failure and disappointments, and pride in accomplishments, is also important.

The ability to maintain members' confidence is vital. Campus gossip is often the outcome of revealing an individual confidence within the house or discussions with other house directors. There is probably no surer way for a house director to lose the respect of the chapter members than to be indiscreet in this respect.

Although there are exceptions, the most successful house directors are usually between the ages of 45 and 60 when they are first hired. The house director must have experience dealing with youth, either through raising a family or regular interaction with college students. The personal knowledge of fraternity and sorority life and the associated traditions and terminology that come from having a son or daughter who has been a member of a fraternity or sorority is a great advantage.

Financial independence is desirable. Complete reliance on a house director's salary can give the house director a sense of insecurity that can often impair judgment and effectiveness. Since the late 1990's, some house corporation officers have allowed house directors to work part-time outside the chapter.

Of all the requirements of a house director, emotional stability is one of the most essential. Coping with the energy of youth and the problems of emerging maturity requires tact, understanding, and emotional stability.

Educational and cultural backgrounds are also important for the house director. He or she need not be a college graduate, but the marks of the well-educated, such as faultless grammar, are necessities. The house director should also have an appreciation of the educational objectives of the university.

If the new house director has been employed at another campus, he or she must be able to adapt to different chapter or campus styles. No assumptions should be made about transferring experiences and responsibilities from one campus or chapter to another.

## How Does a House Director Stay Organized?

1. Use a planning calendar to schedule all chapter events and activities as far in advance as possible. Keep the calendar as a model for the next year as many activities are traditional and occur annually.
2. Schedule blocks of time each day to accomplish the items on a "to do" list. Avoid unnecessary interruptions by specifying certain times when you are available for drop-in visitors.
3. Use forms and checklists for as many jobs as possible (e.g. staff schedules, meal sign-up, food and household inventories, etc.).
4. Assign priorities to all responsibilities and tackle high priority agenda items first.
5. Divide major projects into smaller, more manageable tasks. Recruit others to help if necessary.
6. An answering machine is a must for those times when you're not available; often a short message is easier to respond to than a long, involved conversation.
7. Put together "tool kits" for various responsibilities so that everything is immediately available when needed (e.g. a first aid kit, a kitchen supply kit, a mending kit, a mail kit, etc.).
8. Request that the chapter buy a computer for your use only, and use it to organize a multitude of tasks, plan menus, manage the budget(s), etc.
9. Use email regularly (membership with social networking sites, such as Twitter and Facebook, may also be helpful ways to communicate with the chapter members).
10. Meet with the key chapter officers on a regular basis. Always ask about future events.
11. Have contingency plans prepared for various possible scenarios (e.g. the cook calls in sick, the housekeeper can't come to work, a mixer or social event is scheduled 12 hours in advance, etc.).

## Profile of a Successful House Director

Because the house director is host/hostess for all chapter functions, he/she not only feels at ease, but is able to help the chapter members, parents, and guests feel comfortable in new social situations.

He/she encourages officers to share concerns and keep the house corporation informed.

He/she is pretty slow to give advice, but is skilled in helping others review alternatives and consider consequences. Listening is one of the things he/she does best.

Although he/she may have a "meat and potato" or a "veggie only" chapter, he/she is able to introduce the members to new and healthy foods.

He/she knows a budget is a budget, not a guideline, and lives within it.

Flexibility is his/her middle name. A successful house director understands that plans change, emergencies arise, and young people occasionally make mistakes and he/she takes these in stride.

Does he/she have stamina? You bet! Keeping up with young adults is physically and emotionally wearing. It also helps if a house director can sleep soundly through a moderate amount of noise.

He/she knows when to laugh and when to be serious, when to be firm and when to yield, and can tell a mountain from a molehill at 50 paces every time.

Between the university and the community there are many programs, organizations, and activities. A successful house director participates in many of these activities because he/she has a variety of interests and because he/she recognizes the need to “get out of the house” occasionally.

Playing favorites is not his/her game. A successful house director never gets involved in chapter government or elections.

He/she enjoys the social company of other house directors and never succumbs to the temptation to share gossip.

A successful house director recognizes that the generation gap is valuable and knows that his/her life experiences will be helpful in counseling young people as they react to their own experiences.

He/she never socializes or drinks with chapter members in order to seem “cool.”

He/she has a clear understanding regarding roles associated with:

- Money and budgets
- Kitchen duties and responsibilities
- Enforcement of house rules
- Enforcement of chapter rules
- Chapter initiation
- Emergency chain of command

## What Can the House Director Expect from the Chapter?

The students in the fraternity or sorority chapter have an obligation to keep the house director well informed regarding the members’ and chapter activities and they should give him/her customary courtesies. For example, they should use good manners, speak respectfully, and respect the house director’s privacy.

- Each fall, the officers should give the house director a list of all members with their campus addresses, phone numbers or extensions, and e-mail addresses, as well as all parents’ names, addresses, and phone numbers. When available, the house director should receive a university and/or student activities calendar.

- The social chair should provide the house director with a weekly or monthly social calendar and should always check with the house director in advance of all chapter events and all occasions when guests are invited or residents will miss a meal.
- Committees planning activities requiring food or special materials to be ordered should discuss their plans well in advance with the house director.
- The house director should be notified of special chapter events as soon as possible (e.g. visits by national officers, alumni-sponsored functions, Founder's Day, Parents' Weekend, Homecoming activities, house meetings, etc.).
- All members should be required to indicate when they will be missing meals, requesting late plates, or inviting guests to meals in advance.
- The house director should be notified immediately if a member is ill.
- A copy of fraternity/sorority magazines, newsletters, campus newspaper, and other relevant publications should be given to the house director.
- The house director should be invited to all meetings concerning house matters and special events.
- Guests should always be introduced to the house director.
- The house director should be included in all group functions, activities, and intramural events. He/she should be told which activities he/she is expected to participate in, as well as his/her role during the events, and which activities are optional. The house director should know what the policy is regarding his/her own guests and who will pay for events requiring a fee. In all instances, if the house director is expected - or desires - to attend an event, chapter members should volunteer to escort him/her.
- Following chapter elections, the house director should be informed of the results.
- If the house director is ill, consideration should be shown by offering to take meals to his/her room. Members should be alerted so that he/she is not unnecessarily disturbed and attention should be paid to keeping the area around his/her room quiet.
- The house director may want some "down" time, but chapter members should also drop by to visit him/her every once in a while.