SigEp

5 Steps to Becoming a SigEp Learning Community
How-to achieve Learning Community accreditation for your chapter

This document was written for chapters new to the learning community model. Chapters looking to reapply or reaccredit can use this document as a navigational tool if they are concerned they are no longer meeting the foundation of any particular learning community requirement.

The Five Step Process

Establish a Vision	Build Programming	Identify Key Support	Compile Documents	Apply
1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
Discuss ideal attributes of your chapter's learning community. Create a vision statement for the community. Complete the Learning Community checklist to identify gaps. Align SigEp Learning Community goals to the shared vision statement.	Brainstorm a wish list of events aligned with the vision. Evaluate current or previous Balanced Man Program (BMP) events. Ideate based on chapter strengths and resources. Filter list of events by SigEp Learning Community philosophical standards. Develop a calendar of SigEp Learning Community events for the upcoming year. Plan and execute events.	Identify necessary roles to fill to support the SigEp Learning Community. Align the role description to the vision statement. Recruit to fill the specific identified roles. Identify future individuals to fill roles if necessary.	Catalog all key documentation to capture. Establish structure for tracking and developing documentation. Compile existing historical documentation. Identify upcoming items to document. Establish ownership over future documentation creation and tracking.	Apply annually to receive regular feedback from SigEp Learning Community Committee. Review feedback with key stakeholders. Adjust steps 1-5 based on feedback received. Create plan and assign ownership to implement feedback. Submit new application after implementation of feedback.

Step 1: Establish the Vision for Your Chapter

Know where you're going. — A vision is the optimal desired state of what the chapter wants to achieve over time. It functions as a guide in all operations and is used in the creation of a strategic plan and annual goals. Any vision should provide guidance and inspiration for the organization and members to constantly strive toward.

Creating a vision for the community will help the chapter understand what the community will do, what it will strive to be and how it will create a space to encourage Virtue, Diligence and Brotherly Love. It also helps the chapter decide on programming to include and people to involve in the process.

The chapter should work to create an agreed-upon vision for the chapter's learning community before considering other details.

1.1 | Learning Community Vision Exercise

To establish your learning community's vision, complete the following exercise with your executive board, learning community committee or chapter. Answer the following questions to help you create a vision for your community:

1) **What are you hoping your community can provide your chapter?**

2) **If a learning community is broadly defined as a group of people with common academic goals and attitudes who meet semi-regularly to collaborate on classwork, what do you want your chapter's community to be like, look like or feel like?**

3) **What do you imagine the future of the community looks like?**

4) **What do you envision the learning community's physical space looks like?**

5) **What types of programming are you interested in having in your community?** This could include: academic development, professional development, personal development, workshops, for-credit courses, brotherhood events, etc.

6) **All SigEp communities have a specific criteria to follow for accreditation, though they're encouraged to be unique and specific to the local chapter experience. Is there anything you want your chapter to include that makes your community unique to your campus experience?** This could include: annual campus events, local community engagement, specific speakers, etc.

7) **Does your chapter have volunteers or campus professionals in mind to support the learning community?** If yes, who? If no, where you can find those people to get engaged, and what roles would you aim to fill?

8) **Does your chapter have goals for the learning community?** If so, list them. If not, work with your chapter to create goals for what the community will do and accomplish in the next year.

9) **Does your chapter have a structure to make sure the learning community is consistent year over year? Does this structure allow for the learning community to grow and evolve to meet the needs of chapter members and the campus community?**

1.2 | Write Your Vision Statement

If you're looking to craft a vision statement, you can utilize the following framework to help you through this process.

1) Map out the goals for your learning community
2) Be aspirational about how it can engage faculty, staff and your members
3) Be concise, make the statement no more than a few sentences
4) Make it broad enough that chapter members can bring this vision to life in different ways
5) Ask the entire chapter for feedback on the SigEp Learning Community vision
6) Revisit the statement on at least an annual basis

Creating a vision statement doesn't mean it is set in stone. They can be returned to, reviewed and revised as necessary. Though it is true that any changes should be minimal because a vision statement should have been given a great deal of thought before finalizing it.

1.3 | Learning Community Checklist

This guide includes a checklist of items critical for your chapter to complete before your chapter can become an accredited SigEp Learning Community. These items take time to achieve, and they should be completed thoroughly and with care by the chapter.

If your chapter has many incomplete items, talk with your chapter about how to accomplish the checklist, so you create a SigEp Learning Community aligned with the mission of the national organization and unique to the experience you want to provide the chapter.

1) **Chapter provides a written development plan that includes each written BMP challenge deployed in the BMP App and all chapter learning community programming. Each challenge should include individual personal/professional programs, academic support measures and consequences for membership lapsing.** *Chapter can request that each challenge be pulled from the BMP App by their regional director.*
    - If complete, move to 2.
    - If not complete, build out all challenges and deploy in the BMP App. Show documentation.

2) **Chapter has at least one appointed faculty fellow or resident scholar.**
    - If complete, move to 3.
    - If not complete, add recruitment of at least one faculty fellow to your plan.

- If you need help recruiting a faculty fellow, reference the faculty fellow recruitment guide.

3) **Chapter has written role expectations for how faculty fellows and resident scholars support programming for the SigEp Learning Community.**
   - If complete, move to 4.
   - If not complete, add role expectations for how your faculty fellow supports the programming for your community to your chapter's plan.
   - If you need guidance on a faculty fellow and resident scholar job description, review it [here](#).

4) **Chapter maintains a chapter GPA at or above 3.0 for each of the four previous academic terms (or six quarters, if applicable).**
   - If complete, move to 5.
   - If not complete, add an academic support plan to increase your chapter's GPA to at least a 3.0 for each of the next two semesters (or four quarters, if applicable) to your plan.

5) **Chapter has a written description for how a dedicated space is utilized to facilitate academic programming.**
   - For housed chapters: Regularly used, academically conducive spaces in the chapter facility that are substance-free at all times in accordance with the Grand Chapter Bylaws.
   - For un-housed chapters: Regularly used, on-campus academic space that is substance-free at all times for chapter utilization.
     - If complete, move to 6.
     - If not complete, add a written description of how the space will be used for the community to your chapter's plan.

6) **Chapter has a written description for how university faculty and staff are involved in chapter activities or provide programming in dedicated learning spaces.**
   - If complete, move to 7.
   - If not complete, add written descriptions of how faculty fellows, resident scholars, content experts, and other alumni and volunteers are involved in the community and programming to your plan.

7) **Chapter provides a list of all learning community programming that occurred in the past 12 months with descriptions.**
   - If complete, move to 8.
   - If not complete, create a 12-month calendar of programming that has or will occurr and add to your plan.

8) **Chapter has no member safety incidents or insurance claims that have resulted in an insurance tier increase in the past two years.**
   - If complete, move to 9.
   - If not complete, add a plan to improve risk management.

9) Chapter provides two letters of recommendation from the following roles/individuals:

- You may select one person form each of the three categories:
    i. Chapter counselor, balanced man steward or Alumni and Volunteer Corporation (AVC) president
    ii. Faculty fellow or resident scholar
    iii. University representative (must be separate from chapter counselor, balanced man steward, faculty fellow or resident scholar)
        - If your chapter does not have these positions, work with your regional director, AVC president or other engaged volunteers to create a plan for recruitment of these positions.

1.4 | Establish Goals for Your Learning Community

After you establish the vision for your community, you'll want to set and align goals to ensure that progress is made toward accreditation. If there are any incomplete items in the checklist above, include these items as goals for your learning community and work to achieve those in a timely manner.

Goals should be in a <u>SMART goal</u> format. Set 3-5 realistic goals your chapter wants to accomplish, specifically regarding your learning community.

Step 2: Build Programming

Reinvent before you invent. — Look to what you do or have done that people enjoyed and modify to meet learning community requirements, then look to other learning communities, then look to leverage what's around you (existing campus events, resources, network, etc.), then you can begin to ideate for new out-of-the-box ideas.

An event isn't over until it's been documented. — Maintaining a learning community requires documentation of each event.

Five members at a well-run event is more impactful than 20x at a poorly run event. — Five advocates after a really well-planned and executed event is better than having 20 people you forced to be there telling others that all learning community events are a waste of time.

Get the early win, first. — If you can show the rest of the chapter what an optimal learning community event looks like by doing the first one well, then selling the concept and planning the rest becomes infinitely easier.

2.1 | Program Ideation Exercise

Like the BMP, the best learning community programming stems from the creativity and innovation of brothers and volunteers. Done well, programming starts with blank-sheet ideation that is then supplemented with additional ideas based on what the chapter has done, will do, etc. At each stage, however, event ideas should be filtered based upon the philosophy of the learning community.

1) **What do you want to do?** Create list of potential programs you could host or facilitate.

2) **What do you already do?** List all programming done in the past year. Include programming hosted by your chapter, university and community. Reference past award applications for past records of past programming.

3) **What do you do well?** Think about the makeup of the chapter. Are there a number of members with similar majors, interests or aspirations? Who is in our network of resources (volunteers, faculty relationships, brothers and their families, local community, campus programming and events, etc.)?

4) **What do we need to do?** Apply the "learning community filter" to each proposed event.
   a. *How does this exemplify experiential learning?*
      i. A SigEp Learning Community produces intentional "hands-on" programming that applies lessons members learn in the classroom and in SigEp's own Balanced Man Program to real-world conditions
   b. *How are we utilizing our resources?*

               i.   Facilities / campus space
              ii.   Volunteers, parents, faculty / staff

    c. *Would a university staff member, parent or volunteer view this as an event that makes SigEp different on campus?*
               i.   Would this programming challenge the status quo or help students grow in ways they can't elsewhere on campus?
              ii.   Will this bridge a gap between the fraternity/sorority community and other organizations on campus?
            iii.   Will this help faculty and staff understand the value of a fraternity experience done the right way?

5) **What is already scheduled?** What does the calendar for the rest of our term look like? Are there any pre-scheduled events that can be repurposed? Do some events make more sense in a specific season or time of year? Are there events that need to be canceled to make room?

6) **What will we do this month?** What are the quick-win events that can be accomplished as a proof of concept?
    a. Structured documents for planning, executing, getting feedback on the event
               i.   Assess > Plan > Prepare > Lead > Evaluate
    b. Execution Plan
               i.   Identify who owns each step.
              ii.   Identify when each step will occur.
            iii.   Identify how owners provide updates on progress.

2.2 | Frequently Asked Questions

Q: How to differentiate between a BMP event and a learning community event?
A: BMP-related events are focused and scheduled by challenge. Learning community events are for the entire chapter, campus community or the community at large.

Q: Can women attend?
A: Yes, learning community programming is meant for the entire chapter or the campus community to gain knowledge through experiential learning.

Q: How many events per month?
A: At least one learning community event should be scheduled and executed each month.

Q: What if only a few people show up?
A: Document what took place at the event. Discuss why those members showed up to the event and what they found valuable. Ask other chapter members why they chose not to attend and use that to assess future learning community programming ideas.

Q: What expectations do we set around attendance? Required events?
A: Set a minimum number of learning community program events required per semester.

Q: Can a program serve as a recruitment event?

A: Yes, these are awesome opportunities to show potential new members what their experience as a chapter member would be.

Q: Can we co-sponsor an event with another organization on campus (or with the university)?
A: Yes, this type of experiential learning is beneficial to the learning community concept.

Step 3: Building out the Key Support Figures

Your network is bigger than you think. — The volunteers and stakeholders who can be engaged in the learning community process are more numerous than may first appear. Instructors, campus staff, alumni, parents, and community members can all be valuable additions to a strong learning community. The key is making clear and specific asks, always following through, and showing appreciation.

Show, don't tell. — Most volunteers won't truly grasp what a SigEp Learning Community is until they see it in action. When possible, invite prospective volunteers to learning community events so they can see firsthand what it looks and feels like. You'll find that explaining what it is you'd like from them comes easier once you do.

3.1 | Utilizing a Faculty Fellow

A faculty fellow can be any professional at the university who works (full- or part-time) in any role at the university (student affairs, academic affairs, athletics, etc.) who supports the advancement of the SigEp and fraternity experience on the institution's campus.

This person does not have to be affiliated with a fraternal organization and can be of any gender.

What can a faculty fellow do for the chapter?
Support the planning and implementation of programs tailored to the intellectual development of members, help provide connections on campus, and facilitate workshops or lectures.

How you can recruit a faculty fellow:
- Discuss options with the chapter — create a list of professors and professionals on campus who the chapter interacts with and enjoys spending time with. Remember, this person DOESN'T have to be a professor! Get creative.
- Create a role description (1-5 items of what this person would do and the time commitment).
- Designate one or two chapter members to reach out and set up a meeting.
- Deliver the pitch at the meeting with a clear ask, responsibilities and start date.

Ways a faculty fellow can be engaged with the chapter:
- For-credit courses
  - Certificate programs
- Share their research, teach a class
- Navigating the college experience
  - Leadership development
  - Academic support
  - Healthy relationships
  - Resources on campus
  - Community service

- - Mental health
    - Risk management
  - Professional development
    - Resume workshop
    - Professional attire
    - Professional communication (email etiquette, thank-you notes, etc.)
  - Study abroad

3.2 | Utilizing a Resident Scholar

A resident scholar is a graduate student enrolled in the university who supports the intellectual development of members. This person may live in the fraternity facility (if applicable) and should contact the AVC regarding compensation for work.

What can a resident scholar do for the chapter?
Provide support to the executive board and chapter through chapter meetings, support the chapter's academic plan through workshops or study hours, and perform other duties that the resident scholar might be interested in.

How you can recruit a resident scholar:
- Work with the chapter and AVC to craft a specific pitch tailored to the needs of the chapter.
- Work with the following groups to market the role to graduate students on campus in newsletters, emails and flyers:
  - Office of fraternity and sorority life
  - Graduate life office
  - Specific graduate program offices (business, higher education, education)

Ways a resident scholar can be engaged with the chapter:
- Academic support
  - Tutoring
  - Study hours / office hours
  - Time management workshop
- Graduate school exploration (if applicable)
- Facilitation of BMP challenge meetings
- Facilitation of learning community programming

3.3 | Recruiting Content Experts

Content experts are facilitators who can deliver a conversation or workshop on a topic once a semester or more, based on availability. This person supports the mission of the learning community and advances the intellectual development of the chapter through their workshop. Content experts can be alumni, friends of SigEp, parents, higher education professionals, community members, etc.

What can a content expert do for the chapter?
Facilitate workshops when available on specific topics pre-determined by the chapter based on needs.

How you can recruit a content expert:
Work with AVC to establish a list of alumni, and work with the chapter to establish a list of professionals on campus who could deliver topics once or more a semester.

Ways a content expert can be engaged with the chapter:
- Professional development
  - Resume workshop
  - Professional attire
  - Professional communication (email etiquette, thank-you notes, etc.)
  - LinkedIn / utilizing your network
  - Mini-career fair amongst alumni
- Personal development
  - Changing a tire
  - Filing taxes
  - Leadership / followership development
  - Personal branding
  - Engaging with political topics

Step 4: Supporting Documentation

If there's no documentation, it never happened. — There should be a brief write-up after every event, complete with who attended, who led it, what went well, what didn't, how long it was, how much it cost to host, and any PowerPoint or materials used (save them).

A picture is worth 1,000 words. — There should be at least one photo from every event.

4.1 | Identify necessary elements of the chapter development plan.
- What is it: The chapter development plan is an extension of the Balanced Man Program.
  - Learning community description
    - What is the summary-level description?
    - What structure exists to support the sustained operation of the learning community? (e.g., learning community planning retreat each February)
    - Does the chapter's conduct reflect the philosophical tenets of a learning community?
      - Conduct issues — a brief description of any risk management issue (omitting names), what sanctions came from it, and what additional steps the chapter took to remedy the situation and prevent it in the future. All chapters have issues, but the high performers own their mistakes, learn from them and take precautions to prevent them in the future.
  - Faculty and staff engagement
    - What is the faculty / staff structure that supports the program?
    - How are the faculty / staff engaged?
  - Academic support measures
    - What initiatives and programs are in place to promote the chapter's academic performance?
    - How effective are the initiatives? (I.e., show the academic data and trends.)
      - Grades — Chapter should be able to document trends in academic performance over time. There's an opportunity to differentiate by adding analysis to each term's performance. Was there a new academic program in place that quarter? Were there more Balanced Man Scholarship recipients for that particular new member group? Etc.
  - Experiential learning program

- What is the calendar of events?
- Provide all event descriptions and supporting documentation.

4.2 | Establish structure for documenting identified items.
- Have a common access repository (e.g., Dropbox, Google docs).
- Document the key data points for each category.
    - Conduct
        - Date, type of infraction, sanctions, chapter response
    - Faculty and staff engagement
        - Name of individual, contact info, events they've been involved with, etc.
    - Academics
        - Date, chapter GPA, GPA per class year, graduation rate, retention rate and supporting commentary
    - Learning community programming events
        - Date, location, budget (if applicable), instructor, learning outcomes, summary, photo, attendance, what went well, what to improve

4.3 | Compile old documentation.
- Test out the structure by documenting previous events.
    - Review calendars from previous years.
    - Review applications from previous years.

4.4 | Build the action plan going forward.
- Review the calendar to identify upcoming items to document.
    - What is the calendar for upcoming events? Upcoming academic grade reports? Upcoming guest speakers and facilitators?
    - Assign owners for each item.
    - Set deadlines for how long after each event/deadline that final documentation is to be submitted to the shared drive.
- Set a date for preparing a first draft of the learning community application.

Step 5: Apply

Apply early and often. — At a minimum, plan as if you were going to apply annually. Every time you apply, you'll receive feedback.

Four eyes are better than two. — The application cannot be a one-person effort. Ensure that multiple people have reviewed it. Beyond basic spelling and grammar, the more diverse perspectives with "skin in the game," the stronger the application will be. Leverage volunteers, brothers in the chapter, campus staff, and your regional director to make the application as rounded as possible.

5.1 | Submit an application annually.
- There is no penalty for submitting an application every year, so long as feedback from previous versions is being applied and implemented.
- By applying annually, you ensure that no executive boards let the learning community momentum slide, which is especially important if you're waiting for grades to improve or member safety incidents to expire.
- Once accredited as a learning community, you'll have to regularly reapply to maintain accreditation, so establishing the habit of annual submission can be beneficial.

5.2 | Review feedback with key stakeholders.
- Once feedback is received, those who assisted with the application should be the first to hear the feedback. These individuals will be the best positioned to craft necessary next steps to implement the feedback.

5.3 | Set new learning community goals based on feedback.
- Similar to the punch list, identify the areas for improvement and develop intentional action plans to address the deficiencies.