

Sigma Tau Gamma Fraternity
President-Elect and Board of Directors Candidate
2022 – 2024 Term
John Barger, Murray State
Epsilon Eta Chapter



1. Over the past decade, Sig Tau has taken many steps to build a strong foundation for a successful future. What action(s) by the Fraternity in recent years do you believe is (are) the most critical to it building a strong, successful future? What are the implications of that action? Explain why.

Response: Sigma Tau Gamma reestablished its volunteer support structure at the regional level in recent years. The organizational footprint spans from coast-to-coast, which severely tests the fulltime staff's ability to assist chapters with timely response to non-emergency inquiries. A dynamic regional system has the potential to decentralize support from the Headquarters to the local level. The Regions also assist chapters with information sharing, opportunities for financial support, and opportunities for alumni to remain active as Sig Tau's after graduating college.

Here's the challenge: The Regional structure needs time to hit its stride. In the meantime, chapters deserve and need alumni mentorship & resources as much now as in the future. Moreover, the new structure requires a much greater number of volunteers than what the fraternity has available to draw from. Sigma Tau Gamma produces superb undergraduate programs for our membership. The brothers become excellent young alumni whom we hope will retain Sigma Tau Gamma into their adult lives. Rest assured - our available alumni pool will grow over time, but at what cost while we wait?

I propose placing higher priority on filling the volunteer vacancies for our highest risk chapter locations first at the chapter-level. The organization has passively applied called- for help via social media, emails, etc. in an attempt to boost volunteerism, but feel it is time to increase effort to identify and employ our qualified candidates.

2. What do you believe is the most critical external challenge faced by the Fraternity? Explain why. How should Sig Tau position itself to successfully deal with this challenge?

Response: Public perception represents the biggest external challenge to every fraternity. For more than 100 years, Sigma Tau Gamma brothers have enhanced their universities and communities with countless acts of kindness and professionalism. Our members, like those in our peer organizations, endeavor to make our world a better place. 60 Minutes' story in November 2021 added fuel to negative connotations such as the call to "end fraternities". This troubling narrative magnifies with each risk management violation in the media headlines. Nevertheless, how do we address such negative public perception? I say we are fighting uphill on this one, and we must grind our way to achieving some level of 'success'.

The chapters are performing their own philanthropic events, as well as supporting other organizations' events in their communities. We frequently see the event successes advertised through social media, but frustratingly, the entire Greek community is lumped together when an organization steps out of line. Our brothers are doing great things, and should not be discouraged. The undergraduates are setting the selfless example for all of us, and to this – I say "Keep going! We're proud of who you are and what you're doing." In this, I advise our members to "only worry about what we control", which equates to controlling our own attitudes and behaviors. When

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outsiders criticize us for other organizations' mistakes, we can only point out the good things we do in a professional manner. We control our behaviors by living by our principles and Code of Conduct (which we should all be doing already).

The fraternity's must engage in a complex strategy to fight negative public perception. The Greek community has remained defensive with each isolated incident, and we lose ground with each tragedy. I believe a new strategy may be in order. Sigma Tau Gamma, and the greater Greek community, must mobilize its legislative activities to engage Congressional leadership on our members' behalf. I frequently assist the National Guard Association of the United States (NGAUS) with its periodic digital letter writing campaigns. In these campaigns, constituents send letters to their Congressman/woman and Senators about the issues and constituent needs. The Greek organizations improve student lives and their communities in so many ways. I believe full Greek mobilization - alumni, undergraduate, parent, and friends' participation, in a robust campaign will grab and hold Congress' attention.

Second, we must find a way to enhance our connection with our members' parents. My own daughter is extremely active with her sorority at the University of Kentucky. Her mother and I are truly proud to watch our child grow. Sigma Tau Gamma's own strategic plan proposes to "increase parent involvement through the creation of a parent communication program." The fraternity's programs help our members develop into outstanding young adults. I am sure our undergraduate members' parents are proud of them in the same way I am proud of my own child.

3. What career or life experiences you have had that would most beneficially contribute to the deliberations and decisions of the Board?

Response: My lifelong volunteer service, military and civilian careers, and extraordinary experiences have prepared me for nearly any Board of Director deliberation. I have led and served continually since 2002 with the US Army, Kentucky Army National Guard, Sigma Tau Gamma, and/or the National Guard Association. Each opportunity contributed to my development as a leader and teammate.

Military Experience.

I am an American Soldier with more than 25 years' faithful service. After being enlisted for 4 years, I finally listened to my best friend and attended Officer Candidate School (OCS) from 2001-2002. OCS emphasizes principled leadership, decisiveness, teamwork, and personal/professional growth. This experience touched me so profoundly that I returned to the schoolhouse to train OCS candidates after company command from 2009-2011.

Al Qaeda attacked America on 9/11/2001 and changed the world as everyone knew it. I commissioned as an Engineer 2LT in 2002 and was on the front lines of America's fight over the next decade. My career demanded daily tough decisions in challenging conditions such as planning & executing IED discovery/removal under combat conditions in Afghanistan, providing security for all New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina, constructing primary fence on the US-Mexico border, and assembling 2,000 bed alternate care facilities at minimal expense to relieve overburdened hospitals

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during the COVID-19 pandemic. Each circumstance presented unique circumstances, yet we employed ingenuity, teamwork, and tireless effort to get the job done.

At present, I am honored to command the 206th Engineer Battalion. To add perspective, the Battalion Commander could be the most senior ranking person that some Soldiers may ever interact with. Ask any military officer: Battalion Command demands uncommon leadership, presence, emotional control, and vision. I remember being enlisted, yet never meeting, much less interacting, with my Battalion Commander. Soldiers, like young members, deserve to know they're valued by their leadership, and my personal care is best imparted with personal interaction and presence.

I also have the responsibility to develop future Army leaders and train future Battalion Commanders. I teach/coach/mentor subordinate company commanders monthly. All the while, I must simultaneously hold them accountable for their units' performance as defined by our metrics and standards of excellence. The Battalion fulltime and part-time staff continually require my guidance and feedback on all manner of operational, administrative, and logistical functions necessary to perform our missions. Military punishment, awards, long range training planning decisions & coordination, and personnel management decisions represent only a small example of day-to-day directions that I am required to provide.

We call ourselves the "Frontier Battalion", and our units hold more than 600-Soldiers across the Commonwealth of Kentucky. Since taking Battalion command in August 2019, we've responded to:

- enduring COVID-19 missions such as helping food pantries and hospital support,
- provided security in the National Capital Region after the January 6th encroachment within our nation's capital,
- ensuring voter access and movement at polling stations in Louisville,
- provided timber clearing support after the Winter 2021 ice storm, and
- owned all engineering and support efforts after the devastating Winter 2021 tornado in Mayfield and western Kentucky.

Prior to Battalion Command, I have worked for (and alongside) many types of leaders and served in key staff positions such as Battalion S-3 (i.e., officer in charge of all Training and Operations), Company and Battalion Executive Officer (second in command), and TAC Officer (trainer & mentor for potential Army officers). Each position offered their own challenges and opportunities for growth. Each of these key professional development experiences taught their own lessons, and over time molded my leadership style.

Sigma Tau Gamma experience(s)

I have served the Sigma Tau Gamma Foundation as a Trustee since 2018. I am proud to associate with my fellow Trustees who mentored and befriended me since the first day I joined the team. During this time, we addressed unprecedented fiscal challenges, yet our dynamic group of senior leaders generated new ways to obtain resources for chapters and fraternity programs.

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You'll notice that I have emphasized "resources", and not simply 'revenue' because we are a fraternity (not a factory). Our alumni brothers must be reminded of the hardships of being a young member, and that we must be there for each other. As a Trustee, I endeavored to close the gaping

divide that splits most alumni from their national fraternity headquarters. When we get worthy alumni together with our splendid undergrads, then we will see the deficit of time, talent, and treasure shrink.

I have served as the alumni adviser for Director of Community Engagement with Zeta Beta Chapter at the University of Cincinnati since 2017. I see many parallels between my own undergraduate experiences and those of today. My own chapter lacked alumni support, resources, and mentorship, and it directly influences my relationship with the chapter members. These young men are driven and fun, and I am glad to have helped them fundraise \$4,200 for the Special Olympics, hold their first formal in several years, sponsor ten Nobleman Institute attendees, and more. I am darn proud to associate with these winners, and excited for their future.

I served as my chapter's Alumni Association President from 2014-2021. Our chapter went inactive in 2000 after triumph, drama, fellowship, and heartbreak. We had a short chapter life, but you won't find a closer group of brothers than ours. Each of these experiences developed insight upon fraternal challenges at the local and national levels.

Volunteer Experience. Since commissioning as a US Army Second Lieutenant in the Engineer Corps, I have volunteered with both the National Guard Association of Kentucky and NG Association of the United States (NGAKY, NGAUS) since 2002.

NGAKY has a volunteer Board of Directors and fulltime staff which manage day-to-day operations. The NGAKY's Board meets bimonthly to discuss current legislative issues and local support for Department of Defense initiatives affecting the 8,500-member Kentucky National Guard.

The Kentucky National Guard officer corps elected me as NGAKY President-Elect in 2017 and elevated to President from 2019-2020. As President-Elect, we hosted the National Guard Association of the United States conference in Louisville, Kentucky. The conference generated enough revenue to eliminate all debt and created long-term financial stability for the first time in 25 years. The NGAKY President consults directly with The Adjutant General for Kentucky, as well as all senior leaders, to ensure we're engaging current issues faced by our Soldiers & Airmen. The President and the Executive Director manage legislative activities at the state and national level. During my term as President, the NGAKY created the National Guard Leader Development Foundation, increased membership & participation, hosted military families with the state legislature while it was in session, and held its first virtual State Conference due to COVID-19 restrictions.

Civilian Career.

At present, I am the Plans & Programs Branch Manager and ad hoc Deputy Construction and Facilities Management Officer for the Kentucky Army National Guard. The position manages all Master Planning activities, real estate actions, and incorporates the Adjutant General's vision into

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all long-range major & minor construction projects. I wore my uniform to work every day until November 2018, when I was blessed to have my job converted into a civilian position.

The position is uniquely challenging since it requires awareness of all emerging requirements, building code changes, and program work to meet these demands on our facilities and training areas. I have twice served as the Director while my boss was deployed (2011-2012 and 2019-2020). The Director (a recently retired Brigadier General) is a phenomenal person and leader, and he has mentored me throughout my career since being hired there in February 2000.

Family. Leanne and I met during my first weekend home from Army Basic Training in 1997 and have been together since. We have been married since 2000 and have two awesome children: Sarah Grace (18, New Member Educator for Gamma Phi Beta at the University of Kentucky) and Owen (14, Quad drum player, All State drummer and All State Choir member, and Sig Tau legacy). I have a loving, supporting family that believes in our Principles and culture of fellowship and selfless service. We've discussed what being a Board of Director means and are "all in" with the adventure ahead.

4. What item(s) in the 2025 Strategic Plan do you think is (are) most important? What item(s) would you change? Explain why.

Response: The fraternity produces superb programs, yet these programs require resources to execute. Alumni and parent engagement enables these programs to occur with their proud support while delivering time, talent, and treasure for our membership's development.

Growth is critical at the national and chapter levels. We can responsibly grow on strategically identified campuses, but not at the expense of serving all our existing chapters. Undergraduate member retention must remain an item of emphasis. I firmly believe our active members live extremely hectic social, philanthropic lives when social calendars do not program for free time to study, work, and participation in other collegiate societies & athletics.

I feel that we must insert an Objective in Operations for increases available pool of professional Sigma Tau Gammas onto our fulltime team. We have a superb fulltime team that has earned the highest praises. I believe our full-timers' capabilities would be enhanced with more initiated brothers hired as their coworkers. Most older alumni want to engage other alumni when deal with the Headquarters, and we can alleviate some alumni misperceptions this way. This can best be accomplished by consciously identifying and assisting our brothers into this industry.

5. If you could ask a candidate for the Board any one question, what would it be? Please provide your own answer to that question.

My question. If elected, how do you plan to enhance alumni and parent relationships with the national fraternity?

My Response. It is time to get to work. Board members must engage alumni and parents where they are, and not be contented to rely upon social media to do it for them. We all know that this critical

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group provides the resources to support great programs like Webb and Nobleman. Yet, we lack connection with most chapters and alumni groups.

Here's how: Alumni and parents' events are planned and announced with adequate lead time, and it is on the Board to commit toward alumni and parent connection in-between national meetings. We're elected to represent our constituents to govern, but I feel we should do so dynamically: get outside the closed-door meetings, be present and demonstrating the Principles of Learning, Integrity, Excellence, Leadership, Citizenship, Brotherhood, and connect with undergraduate members.