

**Summary of Fraternity House Living Expenses**  
**and Student Housing Preferences**  
**University of Maine**

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**Introduction**

I have been asked to review the cost per semester for living in a Fraternity house at the University of Maine, along with what trends university officials have noted in the housing preferences of students at UMaine and across the country. This information will be useful in comparing the Alpha Delta Chapter of Phi Kappa Sigma to other UMaine Fraternities, both with houses and with cooks. This will give us good baseline data so we can be realistic in our projections when discussing the financial impact on undergraduates of both hiring a cook and performing major renovations to the house. It will also help us determine what renovations should be made and will give us an accurate picture of the current state of Greek life as compared to when some of us were active members of the chapter.

The summary of Fraternity housing information is based on statistics posted on the Fraternities Page of the University of Maine Greek Life's website at <http://www.umaine.edu/greek/chapters/frat.asp>. These statistics appear to be current as of the fall of 2008. The information about general student housing preferences is based on information provided by Andrew Matthews, UMaine Housing Assignment Coordinator.

**General Findings**

A total of 528 men are members of the 16 Fraternities at the University of Maine. This amounts to 6% of the entire undergraduate population (8,777), or approximately 12.8% of the entire male population, as 47% of UMaine students are men (<http://www.go.umaine.edu/facts.htm>). Each chapter has, on average, 33 members.

Of the 16 Fraternities, a total of 13 had chapter houses. However, for the purposes of this report Phi Gamma Delta (Fiji) and Sigma Alpha Epsilon have been excluded from the housing cost data figures as no information was provided for their semesterly bills. These 13 houses can house 325 students, or about 25 per house. Most houses are 73% full, with 19.8 people living in on average. On average, 54% of Fraternity members whose chapter has a house live in the house. Chapters with houses averaged 36.8 members, while those without houses averaged 20.3 members. Chapters with houses have an average of 16.5 more members than do chapters without a house. We do not have enough information to statistically prove a direct correlation, but certainly a house is a large determinant in the number of members a chapter has.

Of the 13 chapters with houses, 7 (54%) had cooks. These houses average 46.8 members, compared to 25.4 members in houses without a cook. Again, although these

numbers cannot statistically prove that having a cook solely leads to higher numbers, there does seem to be a plausible correlation with a cook equating to a higher number of members living in.

The average semester bill for all 13 chapters with houses is \$2,315.91. For houses with a cook, the average semester charge is \$2,679.17. For houses without a cook, it is \$1,880, or about \$800 less. This difference equates to a \$200 per month charge for food. The median rates for houses with cooks (\$2,862.50) and those without cooks (\$1,800) are similar to the averages.

### **Alpha Delta Findings**

Here is how our chapter compares to other UMaine Fraternities:

- Alpha Delta's 47 members are well above the average (33) and median (28.5) membership rates for all UMaine Fraternities. The chapter ranks 4<sup>th</sup> out of 16 in terms of total number of members, placing them in the top 25%
- Our house has a capacity of 26, and currently 21 brothers live in, making us 81% full. The average fill capacity is 73% and is 78% for houses without cooks (it is 73% for houses with cooks, with a 63% median)
- On average, 58% of a chapter's members live in, compared to only 45% of Alpha Delta's members. Alpha Delta ranks 5<sup>th</sup> out of 13 in terms of number of brothers living in (21) but is tied for 9<sup>th</sup> in terms of percent of members who live in
- Our \$2,000 per semester bill is \$600 less than the average bill for a house without a cook and is \$725 less than the median bill for a house without a cook
- Out of the 5 houses without a cook, our bill is 2<sup>nd</sup> most expensive
- Alpha Delta ranks 5<sup>th</sup> of 11 in terms of total revenue collected of all chapters with houses, and ranks 1<sup>st</sup> of 5 in terms of total revenue collected of all chapters without cooks

### **On/Off Campus Housing**

According to the 2000 U.S. Census, the median rent in Orono, Maine is \$464.00. Assuming that a student would spend \$75.00 per week on groceries for food, it is estimated that a student would pay \$3,146.00 per semester to live off-campus. These are rough estimates, as it is not known if this median rent includes heat, electricity, or other utilities. It does also not consider whether people split the monthly rent between one another and purchase food together in bulk for a possible savings. In addition, leases likely run for a year, rather than a semester, so there would be an additional four months of rent due. For the purposes of this report, however, we will use the \$3,146 per semester number but it will be used with caution based on the information presented above.

On campus room and board prices are much more expensive than Fraternities. This could be attributed to the fact that Greek houses have traditionally undervalued their rent and operating costs (more historical data is needed to prove this assertion) and/or because the University has more overhead – such as administration salaries and benefits – to

cover that Greek houses do not have. While this information is important to ascertain, it is still very relevant to compare on campus costs to off campus and Greek house costs.

Based on 2007 figures from the University of Maine, it costs \$1,797 per semester for a student to share a double room on campus. For a small single it is \$2,246 and for a regular single it is \$2,519. However, I believe a more relevant comparison can be made to suite rooms, which consist of a bedroom (single or shared) and common living areas such as a kitchen and bathroom. For a double suite, the cost is \$1,905 per semester. For a single suite, the cost is \$2,626 per semester. The chapter's rent of \$2,000 per semester is slightly more than a double room on campus would cost but significantly less than what a student would pay for a single room. While a cheaper alternative to campus living is certainly an incentive used by undergraduates to get members to live in, we need to ascertain if, even without renovations, this is a realistic amount.

For board, though several meal plans are available, for the purpose of this report I use the 14+ meal plan as the comparative meal plan. This plan allows a student 14 prepared meals in the dining commons each week, as well as \$100 to spend during the semester at various campus locations, such as the Bear's Den. Since a proposed cook for Phi Kap would prepare approximately 10 meals per week (lunch and breakfast each week day) and food would be available for undergraduates to use for breakfast and weekend meals, I felt this was the best choice for comparison. Here are the semester costs with room and board:

- Double with 14+ Plan: \$3,546
- Small Single with 14+ Plan: \$3,995
- Regular Single with 14+ Plan: \$4,268
- Suite Double with 14+ Plan: \$3,654
- Suite Single with 14+ Plan: \$4,375

Again, the average semester cost to live in a UMaine Fraternity house with a cook is \$2,150, which is between \$1,396 and \$2,225 less than what it would cost to live on campus. This is significant. Again, a selling point of Greek housing has always been that it is cheaper than on campus living, especially since campus living includes other overhead costs that chapter houses do not incur. Nonetheless, the advent of hiring a cook and performing major repairs/renovations to the Alpha Delta Chapter house will likely result in a significant increase in rent for our undergraduates, and it will be important to continue to monitor how our rent would compare to the university's (and other Fraternity houses)

### **Housing Preferences of Undergraduates**

The information below is provided by Andrew Matthews from UMaine Residence Life. It appears to mirror the comments made by some committee members about the preference for today's student to have their own living space. Although this will be a difficult issue to tackle, we should certainly heed the advice given as we want to be sure what we build is what students want to live in. Here are Mr. Matthews' direct comments:

“The national trend in housing preference for students is suites; usually four single rooms surround by a common bath, kitchen and community space. At many state universities, schools are electing to give up bed counts for the type of housing students want. Single beds usually go for about 35% to 50% more than the cost of a double bed. Although some students may not be able to avoid single room housing, **most college students in a school like UMaine have never shared a room in their lifetime.** We currently have about 550 single room spaces at Maine, and there is always a list of students wishing to move into one of these spaces. Unfortunately, in some cases, it is because some of their communication skills aren’t as advanced as they could be, and many times the request for a single is to move away from a fairly simple issue with a former roommate. I have been active in several Housing and Student Affairs organizations and visited many campuses across the country. I think you would find the information I shared above very consistent from school to school.”

When asked if this also applied to Fraternity housing and if living arrangements such as “Rams” were still common, his reply was as follows:

“Some fraternities in the Midwest still use ‘rack rooms’ but the preference for students is having some personal space. It creates a higher renovation/construction cost, but in the long run, might keep the beds filled longer.”

In light of this information, we should begin a serious discussion with the undergraduates and amongst committee members around this topic. Can single rooms be made more expensive to put a premium on the space they might “waste” as opposed to them serving as doubles? Is there a way for the house to even have single live in rooms based on fire codes? What are members of other chapters doing in terms of utilizing a “ram” or single room spaces and are they having success with their situation? Is the “ram” best used as sleeping quarters or for another purpose(s)? This very well may be one of the more crucial components of increasing the membership and live-in numbers of our chapter.

### **Recommendations**

It is clear from this report that Alpha Delta is strong in terms membership but not strong in terms of percent of these members living in. We need to find out why. Is it the condition of the house? Is it the fact that there is not a cook? Is it more a part of other chapters’ culture to live in than it is for ours? Is it inadequate living space? Is it something we may not have thought of? I recommend that we survey the undergraduates on a variety of issues, including questions specifically for those brothers who choose not to live in to see why they do not live in. Questions about having a cook, living preferences, etc. should also be included. Informal conversations with current members can also reveal anecdotal stories as to why our members do not/are not living in at par with the percentages of other houses. In 2007 the undergraduates voted to require all members to live in the house for at least one year during their time at the chapter. This is a step in the right direction.

It also appears that Alpha Delta’s semester charge, above both the mean and median for houses with cooks, is not as low as previously thought when compared to other chapters,

especially given the recent rent increase. We should gauge the financial ability of our members to afford an additional increase in their house bill as a cook and renovations will likely significantly increase the amount they are paying now. In addition, we should begin to consider ways in which to mitigate this increase in the short term, such as using the Educational Fund to provide \$750 scholarships to each live-in Brother for the first year or two.

Finally, a discussion needs to occur around what type of living style we want to create for the chapter. Living in the Phi Kap house has always been different than living in a residence hall or apartment. How do we incorporate the advantages this difference imparts, leveraging our best traditions and experiences in a way that is relevant to today's college man? Will we go with the trend that today's student prefers to live in a single or will we be able to get members to live in doubles or triples and increase numbers that way? How do we ensure a good fraternal experience and bonds are forged with the house layout? How much can members afford to pay in rent? What is our break even point? Should we charge different for singles versus doubles? Should the Housing Corporation take over control of the rent? These questions certainly warrant further discussion and exploration amongst house renovations committee members and with the undergraduates.

Fraternity	Semester Rent (Single)	Semester Rent (Double)	House Capacity	People In House	Cook?	Membership #	% Full	% of Members Living In	Est. Semester Revenue
Alpha Gamma Rho	\$ 3,250.00	\$ 3,250.00	25	14	Yes	34	56%	41%	\$ 45,500.00
Beta Theta Pi	\$ 3,100.00	\$ 3,100.00	26		Yes	52	100%	50%	\$ 80,600.00
Delta Tau Delta	\$ 1,700.00	\$ 1,600.00	24	24	No	26	100%	92%	\$ 39,600.00
Kappa Delta Phi	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	8	N/A	N/A	N/A
Kappa Sigma	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	31	N/A	N/A	N/A
Lambda Chi Alpha	\$ 1,700.00	\$ 1,700.00	24	10	No	22	42%	45%	\$ 17,000.00
Phi Eta Kappa	\$ 1,600.00	\$ 1,600.00	30	20	Yes	37	67%	54%	\$ 32,000.00
Phi Gamma Delta	Unknown	Unknown	30	21	Yes	34	70%	62%	N/A
Phi Kappa Sigma	\$ 2,000.00	\$ 2,000.00	26	21	No	47	81%	45%	\$ 42,000.00
Pi Kappa Alpha	\$ 2,725.00	\$ 2,725.00	21	21	Yes	66	100%	32%	\$ 57,225.00
Sigma Alpha Epsilon	Unknown	Unknown	24	15	No	25	63%	60%	N/A
Sigma Chi	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	22	N/A	N/A	N/A
Sigma Nu	\$ 2,300.00	\$ 2,300.00	17	12	No	21	71%	57%	\$ 27,600.00
Sigma Phi Epsilon	\$ 3,000.00	\$ 3,000.00	32	29	Yes	70	91%	41%	\$ 87,000.00
Tau Kappa Epsilon	\$ 2,400.00	\$ 2,400.00	24	15	Yes	22	63%	68%	\$ 36,000.00
Theta Chi	\$ 1,800.00	\$ 1,800.00	22	10	No	11	45%	91%	\$ 18,000.00
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>\$ 25,575.00</b>	<b>\$ 25,475.00</b>	<b>325</b>	<b>238</b>		<b>528</b>	<b>73%</b>	<b>45%</b>	<b>\$ 482,525.00</b>
<b>AVERAGE</b>	<b>\$ 2,325.00</b>	<b>\$ 2,315.91</b>	<b>27.1</b>	<b>19.8</b>		<b>33.0</b>	<b>73%</b>	<b>60%</b>	
<b>AVERAGE (w/ House)</b>	<b>\$ 2,325.00</b>	<b>\$ 2,315.91</b>	<b>27.1</b>	<b>19.8</b>		<b>36.8</b>	<b>73%</b>	<b>54%</b>	
<b>AVERAGE (w/ House + Cook)</b>	<b>\$ 2,679.17</b>	<b>\$ 2,679.17</b>	<b>26.3</b>	<b>20.8</b>		<b>46.8</b>	<b>79%</b>	<b>44%</b>	
<b>AVERAGE (w/ House + NO Cook)</b>	<b>\$ 1,900.00</b>	<b>\$ 1,880.00</b>	<b>22.6</b>	<b>15.4</b>		<b>25.4</b>	<b>68%</b>	<b>61%</b>	
<b>AVERAGE (NO House + NO Cook)</b>	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A		<b>20.3</b>	N/A	N/A	N/A
<b>MEDIAN</b>	<b>\$ 2,300.00</b>	<b>\$ 2,300.00</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>20</b>		<b>28.5</b>	<b>70%</b>	<b>54%</b>	
<b>MEDIAN (w/ House)</b>	<b>\$ 2,300.00</b>	<b>\$ 2,300.00</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>20</b>		<b>34</b>	<b>71%</b>	<b>52%</b>	
<b>MEDIAN (w/ House + Cook)</b>	<b>\$ 2,862.50</b>	<b>\$ 2,862.50</b>	<b>25.5</b>	<b>20.5</b>		<b>44.5</b>	<b>79%</b>	<b>41%</b>	
<b>MEDIAN (w/ House + NO Cook)</b>	<b>\$ 1,800.00</b>	<b>\$ 1,800.00</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>12</b>		<b>22</b>	<b>71%</b>	<b>57%</b>	
<b>MEDIAN (NO House + NO Cook)</b>	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A		<b>22.0</b>	N/A	N/A	N/A