

Protocol Traditions

Alpha Delta Phi at Cornell University

by Andrew L. Reed '90

Maintenance of a proper level of decorum has long been viewed as an integral part of being a gentleman. A cursory glance might lead one to believe that protocol is only a pompous tradition kept alive by haughty, self-important individuals, but the observation of protocol, whether it be as involved as procedure and manners, or as simple as appearance, is important for a number of reasons.

Following basic etiquette shows respect for the other individuals attending as function. Attending a protocol dinner, dressed in tattered jeans, a tank top, and sandals, may prove one to be a free spirit, but it also shows poor taste and judgment. More importantly, it shows disrespect for those attending dinner properly attired. Acts such as throwing food may be a show of college-boy rowdiness to some, but to most it is indeed a true act of barbarism, often offending the sensible and always offending those who spent time and energy preparing the meal. It is knowing what to do and when to do it that marks a gentleman and defines protocol.

Adhering to protocol also shows respect for traditions and norms that a society such as Alpha Delta Phi has developed for over one hundred and seventy years. Procedures such as following the highest ranking officer present to the dining room, praying or offering thanks before meals, and having dessert only after everyone is served and after the head of the table has partaken are examples of traditions originating from the earliest days of the House. Protocol establishes certain rules at events which allow them to run smoothly and pleasantly. The seating of the highest ranking officer at the meal at the head of the table, and progressively filling the seats eliminates a madcap scramble for seating before dinner. Knowing something as trivial as how to use a twelve or fourteen piece dinner setting without discomfort also allows for a more pleasant meal.

The understanding of protocol thus allows the individual to feel at ease in every event and situation. Ralph Waldo Emerson once said, "The sense of being perfectly well-dressed gives a feeling of outward tranquility which religion is powerless to bestow." This statement can, of course, be applied to all other aspects of protocol. Propriety is part and parcel of self-assurance.

At Alpha Delta Phi, the Protocol Chairman ensures that these certain standards, which should already be tacitly understood, are asserted in the House. He is appointed by the President and serves for one semester. The Protocol Chairman determines what shall be considered proper attire and manners for all designated events where protocol is observed. Though it may seem almost trite, protocol and etiquette are necessary qualities of any gentleman, and especially a gentleman of Alpha Delta Phi.