



# THE ANNUAL REPORT OF THE PRESIDENT

## WHAT A YEAR IT HAS BEEN!

Founded in 1885, this is the 135<sup>th</sup> year of Tau Beta Pi. What an extraordinary year it has been—and it is not over yet. When I began my term as President on January 1, I envisioned a calm year of steady achievements within the Executive Council (EC). That seems a quaint notion now.

The state of the organization is good, surprisingly so, given the circumstances.

- There are 250 active collegiate chapters
- There are 46 active alumni chapters
- Two new collegiate chapters were installed: Arkansas Beta at the University of Arkansas, Little Rock and Texas Xi at the University of Texas at Dallas
- One new alumni chapter, Albuquerque, was installed
- Two inactive alumni chapters, Mid-South and El Paso, were reactivated
- Three petitions for new chapters have been received that require inspections in the coming year
- One school, Georgia Southern University, was inspected and its petition is being considered at the Unvention
- One member was expelled, posthumously

As the COVID-19 pandemic unfolded, the EC monitored the developments across campuses nationwide. The EC did not overreact, nor underreact. In March, we reluctantly directed the remaining District Conferences to pivot to online events, postpone until fall, or cancel altogether. All Engineering Futures Sessions were cancelled. All Tau Beta Pi-sponsored travel was suspended. The EC deliberated carefully and felt these actions were warranted and timely. We did receive criticism from a number of members regarding these decisions. Subsequent developments proved out.

Given the restrictions on in-person meetings on most campuses, the Initiation Ceremony had to pivot to an online event. Ed D'Avignon, Director of Rituals, and many others worked hard to develop and per-

fect an online ceremony that embraced the necessity of change while preserving the tradition. It has been used by 166 chapters resulting in 2,308 new members.

The programmatic successes of the year were focused primarily in two areas, Governance and Finance. Many of the policies that were devolved from the Constitution and Bylaws revision in 2017 remained to be issued for review and use. Headquarters, in cooperation with the Executive Council, developed a process to manage the handling of those many documents. The process engaged a broad audience, including the full EC, Headquarters leadership staff, Student Advisory Board, Program Directors, and others, when appropriate. The Governance Committee and Headquarters staff conducted a diligent effort moving the policies through the process and delivering them to the full EC for adoption. Eighteen of the nineteen constitutionally obligated policies were completed. The remaining policy, the Trust Investment policy, is pending review by the new, expanded Trust Advisory Committee. An additional fifty-nine policies were processed and adopted, further bolstering the policy catalog in several areas.

Numerous financial changes were achieved in 2020. The Trust Advisory Committee reforms begun in October 2019 were completed in 2020. The committee now has five members vs. the previous three. One committee member rolled off and three new members were recruited and appointed. Members serve three year terms and are limited to three consecutive terms. These new members and dynamic turnover of membership ensure diverse perspectives and broad financial business awareness.

The Executive Director filled an open position, Director of Development; Sherry Jennings-King, Major Gifts Officer, agreed to serve in this expanded role. This achieves a synergy between the two arms of fundraising, major gifts, and annual giving. This is a crucial development.

Additionally, the EC authorized the Trust Advisory Committee to identify an active trustee to assist in the management of the Tau Beta Pi Trust. This effort will continue in the coming year.

For many years, Tau Beta Pi operated at a deficit, an artifact of a complex funding profile with many funds restricted for specific use and not available for general operations. The trust spending guide was 5%, averaged over four years. However, the 5% guide was routinely exceeded. The restricted vs. non-restricted funding stream resulted in the deficit being made up from the unrestricted funds, artificially creating an even larger deficit for the smaller unrestricted pool. The majority of the 5% guide was routinely devoted to fellowships and scholarships; thus, underfunding other deserving programs.

In 2020, the Executive Council authorized the phased reduction of the spending guide to 4.5%, enacted over a five year period. Moreover, the period over which the average is calculated was increased to seven years vs. the current four years. Over time, these two reforms will stabilize, and ultimately improve, the organization's finances to a healthy, financially conservative position.

The tangle of restricted and non-restricted funds was revisited. It was discovered that some funds that were considered restricted were not or had been so designated by the EC of that time and the restriction could now be reconsidered. As a result, over five million dollars can potentially be released from the restricted designation.

Funding of fellowships and scholarships will be reevaluated to provide effective funding of those important programs but to also devote necessary funds to other valuable and productive activities, e.g. Engineering Futures, the District Program, and Convention.

I am compelled to remark on the societal unrest across the country, originally triggered by the death of George Floyd while being brutalized by police during an arrest, but subsequently morphing into widespread disruptions associated with inequalities across racial and class lines. Again, the Executive Council carefully monitored these developments. It became clear that a statement from the organization was necessary. The EC deliberated and autho-

riized a message be crafted and sent to the entire membership by email. As with the cancellations, this too generated some negative responses from some members, but the preponderance was supportive. In that statement, the Executive Council made a commitment—a commitment that has proven difficult to achieve. The EC envisioned, and pledged, to host an event offering safe space for members to share their stories and experiences. Paralleling psychotherapy techniques, the vision was to foster open discussions and allow for a catharsis and some measure of comfort from shared experiences. However, as resources were assigned to this effort, obstacles emerged. Discussions were held with several companies that specialize in large scale online events, focused on sensitive topics like race and inequality. The proposals were too ambitious, too expensive, or both.

Eventually, a resource was identified that resonated with the intent. Consequently, a change of intentions emerged. In addition to hosting an event as originally intended, an additional goal is to begin and foster a program that endures. A program that persists and becomes a thread in the fabric of the organization. Not a module or a training class, but rather an ongoing discussion leading to improved racial and social awareness. In short, the ambition will be to provide the vocabulary and awareness in which issues fraught with racial and social disparity can be openly discussed, calmly and without conflict. Based on some of the email received in response to the announcement and subsequent communications from some members, this vocabulary is sorely needed. Let us heed the words of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and strive for a community where all are judged by the character revealed in their actions, rather than the color of their skin, their religion, sexual orientation, or any other societal demarcation. Please join me in future activities of this program as it emerges and matures in the coming year.

Although no one can assure it, I hope to join you in Knoxville, Tennessee, for the 2021 annual Convention.

**C. CRAIG SMITH, P.E.**, is a Spallation Neutron Source team leader at ORNL and earned his bachelor's degree in mechanical engineering from the University of Memphis. He joined the Executive Council in 2018, served as 2019 Vice President, and President in 2020. He previously served in leadership roles with the Great Smoky Mountain Alumni Chapter [TN].