The Graduate Student Council (GSC) debated a bill that would urge the University to permanently unhouse Greek life organizations during its meeting Wednesday night. The bill would also ask the University to redistribute Row housing to prioritize marginalized groups who have been historically excluded from Row and Greek organizations.

The discussion comes amid calls from students to abolish Greek life on campus. Several student organizations, including Abolish Stanford Greek, have asked the University to increase its scrutiny of Greek organizations, alleging discriminatory practices that marginalize underrepresented groups on campus.

Since 2015, the University has revoked two fraternities’ housing privileges following policy violations, and in 2019, the University announced that it would cap the number of Greek organizations housed on campus at 10. The University formally recognizes 30 Greek organizations, nine of which are housed, with Greek organizations jockeying to take possession of the 10th house at 550 Lasuen.

Under the existing campus housing structure, Interfraternity Council (IFC) and Inter-Sorority Council (ISC) organizations are assigned certain houses, and the councils have perennial access to the houses unless they lose their status through the Standards of Excellence program, a set of criteria that is used to evaluate Greek chapters based on positive contributions, diversity programming and alcohol and drug education efforts. The Row and Cowell Cluster, which together consist of 35 houses, include 10 Greek houses.

In 2019 the Kappa Alpha fraternity lost campus housing for at least two years following a violation of Stanford’s Policy on Fraternal Organizations Housed on Campus. In March, the University awarded the fraternity’s former house to the Chi Omega sorority.

Greek life makes up approximately 25% of the total undergraduate student population, according to Residential & Dining Enterprises. A June study conducted by students and researchers in COMM 138: “Applying Deliberative Polling” asked 188 participants to discuss, then rate, the proposal that Stanford “should abolish Greek life.” According to the study, 61% of participants opposed this proposal after deliberation. And 84% of participants agreed that “Greek organizations are biased towards privileging [sic] students in their selection process for new members.”

Alex Young ’20, a member of Abolish Stanford Greek and a participant in the study, added that a number of participants removed themselves from the study when one of the study administrators told them that the survey results did not directly bear on the University’s plans regarding Greek life.
GSC co-chair and bill sponsor Kari Barclay, a fifth-year theater and performance studies Ph.D. student, said that “The Row houses, which are very desirable real estate on campus, could be put to use for more diverse undergraduate housing that is not gender segregated and that is not as overwhelmingly wealthy as a lot of Greek life traditionally is.”

Councilors raised concerns over the possible disruptive effects of unhousing Greek life on nearby communities. Councilor Brooks Benard, a fourth-year cancer biology Ph.D. student, said an unhousing policy could lead to Greek organizations renting houses in the local community to either live or throw parties in.

Young responded that there is reason to believe that the price of housing in Palo Alto, as well as the high rate of students who live on campus, would lead Greek organizations to search for less disruptive on-campus solutions. Young referenced the actions of recent Greek organizations that lost housing privileges as a reference of what the results might look like.

“[Other organizations] do host things that are usually at like a club or a bar in the surrounding community, but not so much in a house,” Young said. “Off campus, it’s usually in official designated venues where there are more protections available for students. So I think that does give us some sense of what things would look like if we were to eliminate all Greek housing.”

The bill would also resolve that the Associated Students of Stanford University (ASSU) would survey students at the beginning of winter quarter about the presence of Greek life on campus.

The Council, which will vote on the bill at next week’s meeting, plans to invite representatives from IFC and ISC in order to have an informed debate before the vote.

Councilors also discussed a survey that the GSC plans to send to graduate students next week on the Campus Compact and the University’s “social pod” program. The survey, which is being written by Councilor Sanna Ali, a fourth-year communication Ph.D. student, will look to gauge whether students are satisfied with the implementation and enforcement of the Campus Compact.

Ali said the survey would help the Council get a sense of any problems, as well as provide an assessment about how students are thinking and feeling about the policies, allowing the Council to better communicate students’ needs to administrators.

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