

A Guide to Planning and Publishing the Chapter *Crescent*

With suggestions for written correspondence
for the Vice Noble Ruler – Alumni Relations,
his committee, and the editor



Alpha Gamma Rho Fraternity

Beta Theta Chapter

2002

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Foreward

In writing this guide, I have tried to take into consideration every question and problem I had when publishing my first *Crescent*. I have also tried to consider those that the future writer might encounter at each stage of the publishing process. I have made many suggestions according to the guidelines from the Home Office, suggestions from the brotherhood, personal experience and stylistic manuals, so that future *Crescent* publishers should have a step-by-step guide with everything they need to know along the way.

There are undoubtedly things that I have left out, but I believe that this guide should adequately suffice as a foundation for writing a sound *Crescent* that fulfills all of its purposes as a newsletter. However, I believe the best guide is a close relationship with alumni and the Home Office and the willingness to elicit and accept good suggestions from them and from others. This is where I got my best advice.

For those already familiar with the process or who do not need lengthy explanations, I have included a **Checklist for Progress**. This will provide a means of keeping track without having to read though the entire text. I have included the correspondence because I feel this is essential to Chapter business, especially for the VNR – Alumni Relations, whose central goal is to maintain communication.

W. Jason Simpson
VNR – Alumni Relations
Beta Theta Chapter
June, 2002

Planning for the *Crescent*

Work on the *Crescent* should be an ongoing process for the VNR – Alumni Relations, his committee and/or the *Crescent* editor. If you stay on top of Chapter business, events and news during the semester, publishing the following *Crescent* will be far less time consuming. Keep a list of the following in a folder dedicated to the *Crescent* and make sure you update it with new information as soon as possible. You may even want to take it to meetings so you can gather dates, handouts and other information. Like a reporter, your job is to keep the alumni up-to-date about everything pertinent to them. Don't fall behind on gathering news, and you'll thank yourself later.

- Summaries of what happened at major Chapter events (Pink Rose, Homecoming, etc.)
- Summaries of what happened at other events (in the Ag Department, at the Livestock Center, etc.)
- Pictures of major events and the names of the people in them (if possible)
- Names of the members of the Alumni Board and their contact information
- Changes in the members of the Alumni Board (both positions and contact information)
- Names of any new alumni (brothers who have recently graduated) and contact information
- Pictures of new alumni (if possible)
- Any news about individual alumni (job changes, new children, etc.)
- Any news for the Alumni Board or the alumni as a whole (decisions, opinions, etc.)
- News from the Department of Agriculture and related ag organizations
- Upcoming events (including dates, times, places, contacts, etc.) for all of the following:
 - National Fraternity/Home Office
 - Chapter (and nearby chapters if pertinent)
 - Alumni Board
 - Department of Agriculture/Events at the Livestock Center
 - Ag Clubs
 - Sports and other events of interest to your alumni

Note that some of these should be already in your VNR – Alumni Relations folder. However, make sure they are easily accessible before it comes time to type and send out the *Crescent*; don't let a lack of information hold up the process. Also, you will note that the list is very long. Of course you will not include all of this information in one *Crescent*, but you can pick the most interesting and high-quality stories out of what you gather. In this way, you are not grasping for news; in fact, more stories means more opportunities and reasons to send out *Crescents*, and the more you send out, the better your alumni contact will be. It's even a good reason to get another brother involved; why not make someone your committee responsible for gathering information for the *Crescent*?

Putting the *Crescent* Together

Long before it is time to mail the *Crescent*, you should have an idea of what its contents should be. As mentioned above, you should have a running list of news and information for your *Crescent*; now you must decide what goes in the newsletter and how it will all come together.

Begin by perusing the news and information you have collected. Find the stories that are most interesting and have the most value to alumni. Don't write about Brother Jones' new calf when Brother Smith just had a baby! The more interesting the stories are, the more alumni will look forward to the *Crescent*. Don't think that they'll read it just because they get it. Let them know that every word of your newsletter is important, pertinent and captivating. Don't dwell too long on a story everyone knows about; tell the reader what they should or need to know, not what you want them to know. In brief, if you did a good job collecting news, the pages will fill up quickly. So, give everything its proper due.

A Guide to Planning and Publishing the Chapter Crescent

One of the most important things you can do is help alumni plan their visits to the Chapter. Do this by letting them know well in advance of any pertinent event that you know of. Even if it won't happen until five months later, let them know now; those who work long hours with little vacation time will appreciate it. The alumni shouldn't have any excuses not being able to come to an event, at least insofar as their being notified is concerned. Encourage them to come, sweet-talk them and remind them that the Chapter is nothing without them. Make them feel like the world will end if they're not there.

In the next section, you will find a list of suggested contents for the newsletter. When you have picked out your information, organize it into categories such as the ones below. Make sure that alumni news takes up 75% of the *Crescent*. The best way to do this is to allow no more than half a page for the Noble Ruler, half a page for the VNR – Alumni Relations, and half a page for the news that relates mostly to the Chapter. Everything else in the newsletter should DIRECTLY pertain to the alumni. Include pictures where appropriate, but beware that they take up valuable space. Make sure that the picture is clear and will be of interest (for information or humor) to the alumni. DO NOT include pictures that:

- Are blurry, dark or otherwise unclear (they will be very dark after printing)
- Contain any scene or conduct unbecoming of the promise and values of AGR
- Contain labels or containers of alcoholic beverages (the Crescent Publishing Service will not print them)
- Might be embarrassing to alumni or undergrads. Don't sacrifice the esteem of a brother among the Fraternity for the sake of a laugh.

Finally, use judgment about what you put in the *Crescent* in general. Apply the above guidelines to written content, as well as pictures, and use common sense and courtesy. The *Crescent* must appeal to everyone, and the best way to ensure this is to keep it professional. Make the *Crescent* appealing, captivating and humorous, but never by sacrificing our principles and ideals. Remember that the newsletter could even be read by friends, family or even acquaintances of the alumnus.

At the end of the organizational process, you should know exactly what will appear in the *Crescent*. You should have reviewed everything according to these key criteria:

- Pertinence to the alumni (remember, 75% alumni content, 25% undergraduate content)
- Relevance to AGR and to the Chapter
- Taste and courtesy, vis-à-vis the Fraternity, the Chapter and the brotherhood
- Intrigue and appeal to readers

Categorize the information into the categories listed in the suggested contents below and begin weeding out everything until it fits page limitations. You may wish to add or subtract from the list according to what you have, but do not exceed the 75% alumni/25% undergraduate rule. This is an excellent time to involve the Alumni Relations Committee and the brotherhood for content and arrangement suggestions.

Suggested Contents and Arrangement

In an eventful semester, you may have gathered a good deal of news and information. The following list will help you decide what to put in the *Crescent* and how to group everything. It will also help you to ensure that you maintain the proper ratio of Chapter news to alumni news. This is not an all-inclusive list, so brainstorm with your brothers to come up with new content possibilities. Spread out the possibilities over the course of the year. For example, list new alumni in the spring and lost alumni in the summer. However, keep everything timely and relative; don't wait until fall to tell about Pink Rose.

Crescent Suggested Contents

Chapter Related

Noble Ruler's report
VNR – Alumni Relations report
Chapter news

Chapter and Alumni Related

Upcoming events
Reports/Summations of events from previous semester

Alumni Related

Alumni response request
New Member recommendations
Introductions of new alumni/new Alumni Board members
Scrapbook/humor
Alumni spotlight
Other alumni awards, etc.
Lost alumni
Contributions from alumni and/or advisers

To get a good idea of how to arrange the *Crescent*, take a look at a newspaper. The most important information is, of course, at the front, but resist the temptation to turn the last few pages into the “scrap pages.” Give each page an interesting story or important news. Spread out pictures and lists to break up monotony.

If you are not using the Crescent Publishing Service (see Publish and Mailing), there are several things you should keep in mind when publishing. Resist the temptation to make the newsletter overly fancy or stylistic. Simplicity and clarity are the keys; the text – not the pictures, borders and highlights – is the essential element. Make all the effort you can and spend a little extra money to make the *Crescent* look as professional as possible. The newsletter should catch the reader's eye, then draw him into the text. Make sure nothing in the arrangement impedes this. Stick to one or two fonts with minimum variation in size, style and spacing. This will establish continuity. Make sure that all graphics contribute to the overall look and work well with other graphics and pictures in the newsletter. Get the opinion of several brothers or pass a rough draft around at a meeting. Pay careful attention to others' suggestions.

Publishing and Mailing

If you did a good job in the previous stages, the publishing and mailing stage should be a breeze. The quickest, most efficient and cheap way of publishing is by using the Home Office's Crescent Publishing Service (CPS). Get in touch with the Home Office to find out how the process works; the basics will be described below. If you do not choose to use the Crescent Publishing Service, you will definitely want to get a few brothers involved. Typing, designing, printing, stuffing envelopes and mailing can make for a tedious process, so have plenty of backup workers. In the next few paragraphs, both methods will be described.

You will undoubtedly have a date in mind for you when you want the *Crescent* out, so plan this stage carefully to stay on track. Make sure that alumni will get the newsletter in time to plan ahead for events. Publishing it yourself can take more time than you expect, and even the Crescent Publishing Service process can take about three weeks. Even though you have everything together, you're still far from the end, so give yourself three to four weeks for the publishing/ mailing stage unless you have lots of brothers working on it. Also, you should read over the Stylistics section before you get too far into the publishing process.

If you decide to use the Crescent Publishing Service, the first step is to get in touch with them through the Home Office and get a brochure or pamphlet describing their current process and rates. This should guide you through the process and tell you everything you need to know. You will first want to type all the text in MS Word ©. It is also a good idea to scan any pictures into the text to illustrate how you want to arrange them. The Crescent Publishing Service will arrange your text to maximize space and good design. Save this file and email it to the Crescent Publishing Service, along with any pictures as separate attachments. You should write a letter to the person in charge of the Publishing Service explaining any preferences or special instructions. You may even want to call to discuss the layout and progress on the publishing, or ask the publisher to call you when she has received your draft. When the CPS has received your files, they will proof and arrange the text into another draft and send you a copy. You can have this emailed to you. This is your chance to look over their draft, make any suggestions or changes and make sure you like what you see. If time permits, let the brotherhood look it over. They may see wrong dates or other things that you have missed. Call in or email any changes to the Crescent Publishing Service or tell them everything is fine with the draft. Once they hear back from you, they will send their draft to be published, and it will go out in about a week. In general, stay in touch closely with the CPS throughout the process as they may have changed the one described above. Once the *Crescent* is out, they will bill the chapter. This amount is determined by the number of copies ordered and the number of pages of the *Crescent*. They will make all the copies the chapter needs and will send copies to your alumni and Chapters nationwide. Check with the Home Office to find out the current rates.

If you publish the *Crescent* yourself, there are many options. The most basic method would be to print out the pages of the *Crescent* from a PC and make copies of them. There are several desktop publishing programs that will help you get a semi-professional look. Of course, this means you must arrange the text, scan in the pictures, add borders and art, and do all the proofing. Very importantly, use printers and copiers that produce crisp copies. The best way to do this is to use a service such as Kinko's, as this will give you the highest quality copies. Make enough copies to send on to each alumnus. You should also send two copies to the Home Office and preferably one to each Chapter nationwide. On a Word page layout for printing labels, type up all the addresses where you will be sending the *Crescent*. This can take a very long time if you are starting from scratch or if you are not familiar with the layout. Print the labels, fold up the *Crescents* and put a label on the back of each. For mailing, you will definitely want to get a bulk mailing permit from the Post Office to save a lot of money. You should have someone check out this process well ahead of time. If you can't or don't get a permit, make sure you use the correct postage on the newsletter. Make sure you have a clear return address on the outside, also, because you will undoubtedly have some returned. If you consider the self-publishing option, be prepared for hassles and delays and get as much help as you can.

The Crescent Publishing Service is obviously the safest, easiest route and it should be the Chapter's choice unless the budget absolutely demands otherwise. It also gives you a good, professional look that would be hard to duplicate yourself.

Checklist for Progress

This checklist will help you keep track of your progress, but it is not all-inclusive. You should read through this guide, keep in touch with the Fraternity and pay close attention to how things are going to make sure that nothing gets left out. It would be very unpleasant to find that the disk of alumni addresses has been lost a few days before your deadline! Do not write on this check list, but do make a copy to check off and keep it in your *Crescent* folder to follow along.

A Checklist for Progress during the *Crescent* Publishing

- I have started and am keeping an active list of dates, events, information, etc., that I wish to include in the *Crescent* and am keeping it in an organized folder.
- I have decided on an approximate publishing deadline that will give alumni good notice about upcoming events.
- I have spoken to alumni or the board to get their opinion about what should be in the *Crescent*.
- I have collected any reports or information from undergrads, advisers and alumni that I will include in the *Crescent*.
- I have categorized all reports and information in my folder according to the “Suggested Contents” list.
- I have chosen information and pictures that meet the key criteria on p. 3.
- I have verified the 75% of the planned content is directly pertinent to the alumni and that no more than 25% is Chapter news and reports.
- I have planned an arrangement for the text and pictures that is clear and captivating.
- I have typed the text for the *Crescent* and scanned in any pictures or graphics.
- I have done a preliminary proofing of this text, watching carefully for spelling, grammar, punctuation and stylistic mistakes.
- I have decided on a method for publishing. (The Crescent Publishing Service or self-publishing)
- I have researched the processes involved in the publishing method that I chose and have planned accordingly.
- I have proofread and have had another brother proofread the typed text for spelling and grammar. (Do NOT rely on spell check!)
- I have proofed for a final draft and have shown it to another brother for his opinions on the arrangement, graphics, pictures, etc.
- I have published the *Crescent* according to the chosen method.
- I have contacted an alumnus to verify that he has received a copy of the *Crescent*.
- I have made a list of returned *Crescents*. I will make every effort to find these new addresses, update my VNR files and send the corrections to the Home Office.

Stylistics

Aside from the organizational and publishing process, there is another factor you should consider when writing the *Crescent*. The text must be absolutely correct in the following areas:

- Spelling
- Grammar
- Punctuation
- Capitalization
- Style (level of language, appropriate choice of words, consideration of audience, etc.)

Don't rely on spell/grammar check or the Crescent Publishing Service to do it all for you. Most importantly, verify your spelling with a dictionary. A text that contains orthographic errors, even slips, looks very unprofessional. Your alumni are well-educated and will appreciate your attention. Spellcheckers will not always catch common errors, such as "accept" for "except" and "through" for "threw," nor will they catch every grammatical mistake or slip of the keyboard. You must proofread it carefully and attentively yourself, and preferably have one other person – one with good writing skills—proof it also. Watch for homophones (know/no, their/they're, too/to/two, etc.) as these are particularly troublesome.

Proofread your grammar also, though this will present few problems for anyone who is fairly competent in writing. The biggest problems arise from not paying attention to what you write or type, especially with subject-verb agreement.

Punctuation and capitalization are important in writing because they help divide the text into sensible parts. Believe it or not, you are accustomed to using punctuation to help you read, so make sure your readers have the same advantage. Commas and comma splices are major problems in most writing. Quotation marks also tend to be troublesome. Capitalization is usually not a problem, though you should be consistent. If you choose to capitalize "alumni" all the time, make sure it is always capitalized. The same goes for 'chapter,' 'fraternity,' and so on. The basic rule is to capitalize these when they are specific (Alpha Gamma Rho Fraternity, Beta Theta Chapter, our Chapter, etc.), but not when they are general ("There are many chapters and several fraternities on campus."). Consult a style manual when in doubt.

Finally, make your text stylistically sound. Try not to sound too "familiar" ("Hey y'all, here's yer *Crescent!*"), but avoid the overuse of words and structures that might be unfamiliar to your audience or overly high in the register. Also, be consistent in style, especially if several people are writing the newsletter. The text should sound like the same person wrote it all with the same level of language. If you are unfamiliar with good writing techniques and feel uncomfortable about how your writing sounds, it will be to your advantage to skim through a manual on reporting or journalistic writing for some tips. Finally, watch out for clichés and avoid trying to be too witty. In a newsletter, your primary stylistic goal is clarity. A clear, sound text will be enjoyable to read for all. Lastly:

The Golden Rule for the VNR – Alumni Relations:

One **alumnus**
Many **alumni**

Using the correct forms "alumnus" (singular) and "alumni" (plural) will add professionalism to your writing. If you ever write about the female "alumni" of an organization, one is an "alumna" and many are "alumnae." If the group is of mixed gender, the standard is "alumni." So:

"He is an alumnus of Alpha Gamma Rho. His wife is an alumna of Chi Omega. They are both alumni of MTSU."

Appendix A: Contact information for the Home Office and the Crescent Publishing Service

The people at the Home Office are eager to help you with any problems, so make sure you keep in contact with them. They can even provide you with examples and tips for publishing your own *Crescent*. If you find the addresses for alumni whose *Crescents* were returned (“lost alumni”), promptly notify the Membership Coordinator of the new address by telephone, fax, email or mail.

Home Office

Address: Alpha Gamma Rho Fraternity
10101 N Ambassador Drive
Kansas City, MO 64153-1395
Telephone: (816) 891-9200
Fax: (816) 891-9401
Website: www.agrs.org

You can contact the Crescent Publishing Service through the Home Office contact lines.

Appendix B: Sample Correspondence

Letter writing is a much neglected skill, especially in the electronic age. There are times, however, when you should consider using paper correspondence. For example, you may wish to send a brief letter to alumni or write to the Home Office.

The following letter format will serve almost any purpose. Note that if you use letterhead (paper that already has the Chapter’s address printed on it) you will not type the return address (yours) in the letter. If you cannot find any letterhead, you may wish to create your own or have some printed; as always, simplicity is the key—don’t get too fancy. In any case, you should try to use slightly heavier paper with watermarks (designs visible when you hold the paper up to the light) to make your correspondence look very professional. It’s a much nicer look than the impersonal bleached white of normal printer paper.

You may wish to make the style of your letter reflect your fraternal relationship. If you write to fellow brothers (alumni or undergraduates), you can address them in the salutation “Brother.” The address should preferably still read “Mr.” though. When you write to someone who obviously isn’t a brother, however, this is not acceptable; only use “Mr.” or “Ms.” Any time you are writing to a brother as part of your duties, observe a formal level of language for professionalism. The address on the envelope should read exactly as the address line in the letter. For more information, see a style manual or look on the internet.

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Sample A: Template for Indented Format Letter

Your address
Your address
Date

Addressee's name
Addressee's title (if applicable)
Addressee's address
Addressee's address

Salutation

This area is the body of the letter. You should indent the first line of each new paragraph, just as you would with regular writing. Use Times or Arial fonts at 10 or 12 points. Lines should be single spaced. Remember to keep the body of the letter clear and concise, so that the reader knows right away what you're writing about. The message should be brief and to the point and generally should not exceed two pages.

If you are unfamiliar to writing, have someone read your letter to make sure it sounds professional and is easy to understand. As with any writing, check for spelling, grammar and stylistic errors. Consult a style manual for tips about letter content.

Closing,

Your signature

Your name typed
Your office
Your Chapter

Enclosure(s): list enclosures here
List enclosures here
List enclosures here

You will notice several things about the above letter. The indented format is a good medium between personal and business correspondence. It is definitely preferable when you are not writing on letterhead. If you are writing to someone with a title (for example, to the Membership Coordinator), you should include that title under their name in the address. Notice how the salutation format changes (colon vs. comma after salutation) in the two following model letters. The colon is for strict business (to the Home Office) and the comma for more personal tones (to a fellow brother or alumnus). The body should look just like any typed text. The closing should be appropriate to your audience, as you will see below. "Fraternally," is acceptable for brother-to-brother writing, but is not preferable when writing to someone who is not a member of the Fraternity (Ms. Feeney, for example, who works in the office, but is obviously not a brother!). Sign your name in black or blue ink between the closing and your typed name. Allow about four spaces for this, and avoid using a scanned-in computer signature like so many offices use. This, in my opinion, defeats the point of personal correspondence and draws a huge, impersonal line between you and your reader. Think of your signature as your handshake in writing; it should say "Yes, I am really talking to you personally." Type your name and then your office in the Chapter. Include your chapter name because each chapter has a version of your office. If you put anything in with the letter, be sure to list it in the enclosures. This could be a disk, a flyer, a ticket, etc. The following examples, one to the Home Office and one to an alumnus, will illustrate how the template in Sample A is used.

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1301 E. Main Street
MTSU Box 629
Murfreesboro, TN 37132
May 5, 2002

Ms. Jackie Feeney
Membership Coordinator
Alpha Gamma Rho Fraternity
10101 N Ambassador Drive
Kansas City, MO 64153-1395

Dear Ms. Feeney:

I am writing to send you a list of addresses for some of our previously lost alumni. We are pleased to have had a great deal of success this semester in locating them. I have included telephone numbers and any other contact information where possible.

Sincerely,

Wm. Jason Simpson
VNR – Alumni Relations
Beta Theta Chapter

Enclosure: Address Changes

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1301 E. Main Street
MTSU Box 629
Murfreesboro, TN 37132
June 18, 2002

Mr. John Smith
145 Main Street
Murfreesboro, TN 37132

Dear Brother Smith:

On behalf of the undergraduate brothers of the Beta Theta Chapter, I would like to extend our warmest greetings. As you may already know, the date for the Fall Cookout has been changed this year. The new date is September 23. We hope you will still be able to attend and hope you will encourage other alumni to come as well. The cookout will begin around 4 p.m., and we plan to start eating at around 6 p.m.

We look forward to seeing you then and wish you the best for the summer. If you would like to know more about the day's events, please feel free to call me at (615) 555-4321.

Fraternally,

Wm. Jason Simpson
VNR – Alumni Relations
Beta Theta Chapter