



## Frequently Asked Questions Honorary Philomathean Members and Future Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Efforts

### **Why were three Confederate men honorary members?**

Although the specific details are not well-documented, our history books state that in the 1860s, members of the Philomathean Society offered honorary memberships to Robert E. Lee, Stonewall Jackson and Jefferson Davis. Lee and Jackson were leaders of the Confederate Army during the Civil War and Davis was President of the Confederacy. It was fairly common practice for Philomatheans to honor local community members, both men and women, in this way. These three men did not go through any Ritual Service and were never granted membership status of any type in Phi Mu Fraternity.

### **Why did it take so long to issue this statement?**

The topic of the three honorary members has been discussed by Phi Mu leadership previously but the recent events of racial violence prompted a groundswell of support from members demanding action on the association of these men with our organization. Having these men as honorary members is not reflective of the values of Phi Mu Fraternity. We know that this decision came far too late for many members, especially for our Black sisters.

### **Why can't we revoke the honorary membership of these three men?**

Since becoming incorporated with our new name and at the second national convention in 1908, Phi Mu Fraternity has not sanctioned or accepted "honorary members," despite what the Philomatheans proclaimed previously, making their actions officially null and void.

### **How do I respond to members who complain that this action was not enough?**

Phi Mu leadership understands that some people wish that a stronger action was taken. This statement is just the beginning of Phi Mu's diversity, equity and inclusion work.

### **How do I respond to members who complain that we're "erasing" a part of Phi Mu's history?**

While those honorary memberships have been renounced and are now null and void, this will remain a part of Philomathean history that will be discussed in context with an understanding of how that history has shaped our organization.

### **How do I respond to members who complain that this action was not necessary?**

Phi Mu took this action to show support for our past, current and future Black members. We have received overwhelming support from members of all backgrounds for taking this action. Having any kind of association with these three men is hurtful to our Black members. Addressing these honorary memberships is just the first step in the future work Phi Mu will do to address diversity, equity and inclusion within our organization.

**What education and resources have Phi Mu already provided and conducted in the recent past to enhance the cultural competence and awareness of biases for our membership?**

In 2016, Phi Mu's National Council created five Ends Policies to set strategic priorities for our organization including one dedicated to the development of the cultural competency of our members. Over the past four years, programming for the New Member Experience, Phi Mu Officer Academy and Phi Mu Leadership Institute have been revised to incorporate inclusive language in the curriculum. These programs had a collective impact on over 20,000 members. A Radiance Program called Diversity Awareness was also created and made available to chapters and a "world view" was added to the Phi Modules for new members. In 2018, Dr. Sondra Thiederman, a national expert on unconscious bias, led a training for National Headquarters staff and volunteers and also made a presentation to the 700 attendees at National Convention that year. In addition, approved social event themes are reviewed and revised each year to avoid cultural appropriation and heteronormative language has already been removed from the Risk Management Policy.

**What are Phi Mu's plans for diversity and inclusion going forward?**

This work will take time to do well and this process will be gradual and ongoing. It will require honest, difficult conversations regarding parts of our history of which we are not proud. While we must address our past, we are committed to moving forward and continuing to make progress for the benefit of our members. Over 300 members have self-identified that they would like to be part of this process moving forward and we will work to find ways to engage these women in a meaningful manner. One immediate next step is to create a Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) Working Group. This Working Group will seek feedback from members on experiences of marginalization and microaggression and learn from experts on ways we can make Phi Mu a stronger, more inclusive organization. While the Working Group is an ongoing commitment, the diversity, equity and inclusion work is not confined to that group. There are many immediate needs and opportunities to be involved, at various capacities and time commitments.