2019-2020: Chapter Report

South Dakota Phi Alpha

June 2020

Academic Year: 2019-2020
Chapter: South Dakota Phi Alpha

---

1 Overview

For students, teachers, faculty, and administrators all over the world, 2020 was a year that expanded our limits of ingenuity and adaptability. The Coronavirus pandemic delivered an unprecedented shake-up to the school routine and forced the rapid deployment of expansive virtual education. Things were no different at South Dakota School of Mines and Technology. The first half of the spring semester provided no indication of the challenges to come. It was not until the week of spring break (March 9) did the reality of the pandemic hit SDSM&T students with full force. On March 12, SDSM&T President Jim Rankin announced the extension of spring break through March 22, and on March 16, it was announced that all classes would move online through at least April 3. Finally, on March 24, the SD Board of Regents made the decision to move all classes online for the remainder of the spring. In a span of 12 days, we went from business as usual with very little reason to believe anything would change to a fully virtual education system. It was a remarkable acceleration, and much gratitude is owed to all those involved at the school who ensured clear communication and asserted the proper course of action for SDSM&T. Additionally, the faculty deserve tremendous credit for rising up to the occasion and in an enormous time crunch, delivering quality education though virtual means.

2 Chapter Operations

After a decade of dormancy, the South Dakota Phi Alpha chapter was reactivated at the South Dakota School of Mines and Technology Campus during the spring 2019 semester. The 2019-2020 academic year thus represented the first full year of operation for the re-formed group. Our focus this academic year was to establish a presence on campus and in our department through the following goals:

1. Working with our student senate to become a university recognized organization

2. Hosting skillset-building workshops

3. Hosting weekly, open tutoring sessions (4 hours per week)

The first item involved working with the SDSMT student association senate to draft chapter bylaws in accordance with university policy. In fall 2019, South Dakota Phi Alpha was officially accepted by the student association senate as a university organization. The second item was realized when president Daniel Boe hosted an "Introduction to Python for Engineers" session in the fall. A second such session was planned for the spring semester; however this was canceled due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Finally, starting in spring 2020, SD Phi Alpha began hosting open tutoring sessions twice a week. Unfortunately, these too were cut short due to the pandemic.

3 Initiations

Candidates for initiation were selected based upon the criteria established in the Pi Tau Sigma Chapter Manual. All eligible candidates were invited to an information session held late in the fall semester. Unfortunately, because of postponements associated with becoming a university recognized organization, the deadline for a fall 2019 initiation was missed, so it was decided that the two interested candidates would be initiated in spring 2020 instead.

Going into the spring 2020 semester, our goal was to host an information session followed by an initiation one week later near midterm. We targeted midterm for these events as that would allow us several weeks to interact with the student body and build awareness for PTS though our weekly tutoring sessions which kicked off in mid-January. However, the coronavirus pandemic forced the cancellation of these plans. Because SD Phi Alpha was a new group with very limited member participation, it was decided that attempting to host an adequate information session and meaningful initiation virtually would be impractical - especially considering the uncertain environment and added stress upon the campus community. Although we deemed it best to suspend our plans for requiting new members, it was obvious that we had to uphold our commitment to the two candidates from the fall 2019 information session. Hence, a virtual initiation for these two initiates was held on April 24, 2020 with the chapter treasure serving as acting vice president.