

Conducting Alpha Chi Oral History Interviews



Whom to Interview

You should plan to interview a wide range of people connected to Alpha Chi. There really is no limit to the people you might interview. Some prime candidates would be:

- Current Alpha Chi members
- Alumni members of Alpha Chi (maybe those from your college that won Alpha Chi scholarships)
- Current Alpha Chi sponsors and co-sponsors
- Former Alpha sponsors and co-sponsors, even if they are not still at your institution
- Faculty and administrators at your institution who interact with Alpha Chi
- Regional and national Alpha Chi leaders, present and past
- Alpha Chi national office staff, present and past
- Alpha Chi National Council members, current or former
- Sponsors of former Alpha Chi Chapters at nearby colleges

Important Reminders

1. Let the interviewee talk. Although oral history develops best as a conversation, resist the tendency to interject too much of yourself into this conversation. Allow the interviewee to speak as long as possible and to finish thoughts. Do not add words in response or support but rather smile and nod your head “yes” or “no” so that the interview’s thoughts and recollections are recorded rather than your own. Otherwise, the record will be full of the un-videod you.
2. Have some questions in mind. While you’ll want to make your interview more of a conversation than a series of questions and answers, you still will want to have questions about Alpha Chi in mind that need to be answered. As noted above these may involve inductions, dinners, conventions, service projects, and a whole host of activities.

Prelude to an Interview

The best oral history interviews are conversations with people who feel comfortable talking with the interviewer. Hence, the best prelude for an interview is to talk with the interviewee about their interests, college experience, and other warm-up topics. This discussion doesn’t need to be long but friendly and reassuring, and it may lead seamlessly into the oral history interview.

Building Rapport Sample Questions:

- Thank you for finding the time for this interview. Are you interested in history or oral history?
- Have you ever been interviewed like this?
- I see from your [trophies, décor, photos, etc.] that _____ is a passion of yours. Tell me a little about that.
- Are you excited about telling your Alpha Chi story?

Explaining Informed Consent and Getting a Signed Deed of Gift

After developing rapport, explain the interview process, making sure to note the right to refuse any questions or topics and that they’re invited to review the video or transcription before it’s used. IRB approval is not required for oral history.

Sample Housekeeping Questions:

- Do you have any questions about how the interview will be conducted?
- Do you have any questions about your right to decline to answer any question I might ask?
- Do you have any questions about your right to edit the interview transcript?
- Do you have any questions about how the interview will be archived?
- Do you have any further questions before we start the interview?

Starting the Actual Interview

When all of the interviewee’s questions and concerns have been answered, the tablet, phone, or other recording device can be turned on and the interview formally begun with, “This is an interview with [name of interviewee], who is/was a [student/professor/sponsor/other] of Alpha Chi at [name of college] in [city, state, and Region of Alpha Chi]. This interview is being conducted by [name of the interviewer/s] from the [chapter name] and [college name] at [place interview is being held] on [date] at [time].”

An excellent way to begin an oral history interview is to allow the interviewee to establish background in his or her own way by opening with the icebreaker, “[Name of interviewee], how did you first come to arrive at [college]?”

After enough background’s been established, a good comfort level is achieved, and a real conversation (as contrasted with a strictly question-and-answer interview) has been created, you should move on to Alpha Chi with a simple question such as,

Sample Questions for Student or Alumni Members:

- How did you first become involved with Alpha Chi?
- Can you describe your induction experience?
- What kinds of events did your chapter focus on the most?
- Were there any service projects that you were able to help with? Please describe them.
- Did you have any leadership roles in the chapter, region, or National Council? Please describe.
- Did you attend any national or regional conventions? When? Where? Please describe them.
- Can you think of anyone else who might participate in the Alpha Chi Oral History Project?
- Can you describe your involvement with Alpha Chi as an alumni and why you feel it’s important to stay involved?
- How did your Alpha Chi experience help shape your life after college?

Additional Questions for Faculty or Administrators:

- What were your favorite courses to teach?
- Were you able to continue research in your field?
- What was [college name] like when you arrived here in [year]?

Exploring Prior Connections at Other Institutions

If you’re interviewing a sponsor, faculty member (current or retired) who answers that they were inducted into Alpha Chi themselves, that opens up a whole series of questions of their history with Alpha Chi there that you could pursue.

Sample Questions:

- Can you describe your induction experience there?
- What kinds of events did that chapter focus on the most?
- Were there any service projects that you were able to help with? Please describe them.
- Did you have any leadership roles in the chapter, region, or National Council? Please describe.
- Did you attend any national or regional conventions? When? Where? Please describe them.
- Can you think of anyone else who might participate in the Alpha Chi Oral History Project?
- Can you help me get in touch with them for an interview?

Family Connections

Another example of questions stemming from the initial response might be a student interviewee’s statement that their parent or sibling had been inducted into Alpha Chi as lifetime members. Follow-up questions to such responses might be:

- Where and when was your [parent/sibling/other relative] a member of Alpha Chi?
- Did they tell you about any of their Alpha Chi activities/memories?
- Can you share with us anything you learned about their Alpha Chi experiences?
- Do you think any of your family members might be willing to participate in the Alpha Chi Oral History Project?
- Can you help me get in touch with them for an interview?

Personal Involvement in Alpha Chi

Having created a comfortable environment of trust in a free-flowing conversation and having also recorded institutional affiliation, family connections, and initial Alpha Chi connections, you can now pursue the interviewee’s complete personal Alpha Chi involvement. In conversational style, you should allow the interviewee to discuss the whole range of Alpha Chi participation.

Sample Questions:

- What was your induction ceremony like? Please describe it.
- Have you participated in other induction ceremonies? Please describe them.
- What kinds of chapter activities does your chapter have? Please describe them.
- Would you like to say anything about your chapter’s sponsors?
- Have you had leadership roles in Alpha Chi (chapter, region, national)? Please describe.

- Have you participated in any service projects? Please describe.
- Have you attended any conventions? Please describe them.
- Did you make a presentation at a convention? Please describe it.
- Does your chapter have any noteworthy members? Would you talk about them?
- Can you share any significant/notable/funny incidents from being part of Alpha Chi?

Of course, if the interviewee is a chapter advisor, college administrator, or other non-current student, these recollections may involve more than one college/university.

Topics Other than Alpha Chi—A Resource for Future Historians

Never hesitate to allow the conversation to flow into other topics. Even though the focus of the interview should be Alpha Chi (institutional, regional, and national; present, past, and future) and, to a lesser extent, the interviewee's college or university, the oral history that you are recording should also be seen as a resource for historians of your city and state as well as for historians studying higher education, student life, regional agriculture, local industries, and other topics that are relevant today and that may be of interest in the future.

Alpha Chi's oral history project is without question a celebration of the honor society's centennial anniversary, but it's also a valuable service project for your college, university, city, town, and history in general. We don't know what questions historians will ask in 50, 100, or 150 years, and you are preserving valuable primary resources to assist them.

After the Interview

1. Be sure to thank the interviewee personally and later send a thank you note or email in which you also explain again what will happen to the interview.
2. Ideally, transcribe the interview. Since few people talk without switching thoughts or inserting junk words, transcribing can be a challenge. Nevertheless, the aim should be a true and complete transcript of what is said rather than one modified and reworked by the interviewer to complete the interviewee's thoughts. There are some electronic aids for transcribing, such as Microsoft Stream, but with the current state of technology, is often less time consuming simply to listen and type.
3. Supply a copy of the recording or a draft of the transcription to the interviewee for review, asking them to approve as is or request modifications, if needed. Corrections of spelling, personal names, and the like are considered "corrections." "Modifications" are when the interviewee requests that part of the interview be deleted from the transcript.
4. Make the corrections in the transcript. If modifications are required, remove them from the transcript. They will, of course, remain on the recording of the interview.
5. Once the recording and the transcript have been approved, the chapter or interviewer will send a copy of the digital recording of the interview, the transcript (in digital or paper form), and a copy of both the consent and deed of gift forms to Alpha Chi's national office. In your cover note, indicate if modifications were made in the transcript, but do not detail them.
6. Place copies of the interview, the transcript, the signed consent documents, and a cover letter in your own college or university's oral history collection. If your college or university does not have an oral history collection, consider making it a service project of your Alpha Chi chapter to initiate one.



Informed Consent Form

1. You are being asked to participate in an interview in connection with Alpha Chi National College Honor Society's Oral History Project because of your connection with Alpha Chi. You will be asked to record your memories about Alpha Chi and what you would like history to remember about Alpha Chi.
2. The interview will be digitally recorded in audio and/or video, transcribed, and made available for public and scholarly use by Alpha Chi, our official archives at Southwestern University in Georgetown, Texas, as well as at the archives of the interviewer's college or university. Any member of the general public will have access to this interview and your words may be quoted in scholarly and popular publications.
3. The interview will take approximately one hour. There are no anticipated risks to participation in this interview. However, you can withdraw from the interview at any time without prejudice prior to the execution and delivery of your Deed of Gift. You may also make special provisions or restrictions in the Deed of Gift. During the interview you may request to stop the recording at any time to discuss or clarify how you wish to respond to a question or topic before proceeding. In the event you choose to withdraw during the interview, any recording made of the interview will be either given to you or destroyed, and no transcript will be made of the interview.
4. Subject to the provisions of Paragraph 5, upon completion of the interview, the digital recording and content of the interview belong to Alpha Chi National College Honor Society. The interview will be ultimately housed online by Alpha Chi, stored as part of Alpha Chi's archives kept in Special Collections at the Southwestern University Library, and offered to the archives of the interviewer's college or university. It may be administered in any manner those entities determine, including, but not limited to, future use by researchers in presentations and publications.
5. Alpha Chi National College Honor Society agrees that:
 - a. It will not use or exercise any of its rights to the information in the interview before a Deed of Gift is signed.
 - b. The Deed of Gift will be given to you for your signature immediately after the interview.
 - c. Reasonable restrictions on the use of the interview can be placed in the Deed of Gift by you and will be accepted as amending Alpha Chi National College Honor Society's rights to the content of the interview.
6. Upon signing the Deed of Gift, the digital recording will be submitted to Alpha Chi National College Honor Society which will distribute them as described in Paragraph 4.
7. The entire original interview will be stored in the official Alpha Chi Archives located in the library on the campus of Southwestern University in Georgetown, Texas. The National Office may add text to the interviews, including names and titles of the interviewees.
8. Shortly after your interview is complete, you may request a copy for review. If there is anything you would like specifically edited from the footage made publicly available, please communicate in detail what you'd like done at the bottom of this form. At the point at which written transcripts of the interviews are created, the transcript will match the edited footage.
9. The National Office plans for an Alpha Chi Oral History page to be accessible from the Alpha Chi website at alphachihonor.org, where the interviews may be publicly available in time for the centennial convention in March 2022.
10. If you have questions about the research project or procedures, you may contact Lara Q. Noah, Executive Director, Alpha Chi, 124 W. Capitol Ave., Ste, 1630, Little Rock, AR 72201, 800.477.4225, or lnoah@alphachihonor.org. On 8/1/21, the office mailing address will be 8 Shackelford Plaza Ste 200, Little Rock, AR 72211.