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# Historically Speaking.....

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*Would you explain when to use “alumna” and when to use “alumnae”?* This is a good question. As Kappas, we want to be sure to use the words correctly. The information written by Gay Chuba Barry, *Penn State*, Fraternity Publications Chairman, 1988-2004, will help clarify your confusion.

Alumna – Alumnae...Oh, Dear!

“Latin is a language,  
Dead as it can be.  
First it killed the Romans,  
And now it’s killing me.”

For most of us who took Latin in the “dark ages,” that little ditty carried the day for us. And oh, how I can remember my Latin teacher, Miss Will. Drill was not a word she took lightly. This brings me full circle to the use of the words “alumna” and “alumnae” in their various forms.

**Alumna – feminine singular. It can be used as a noun or as an adjective (modifier).**

Noun – *Mary is an alumna of Ohio State.*

Adjective – *Mary is an alumna member of Kappa Kappa Gamma.*

When using alumna as an adjective, never use the plural form. Only nouns can be in plural form.

Adjective – *Mary and Jane are alumna members of Kappa Kappa Gamma.*

Notice that even though “alumna” is modifying a plural noun, it remains in singular form, because in this case it is used as an adjective.

**Alumnae – feminine plural. It can only be used as a noun.**

Plural noun – *Mary and Jane are alumnae of Ohio State.*

Parallel examples: collegiate members/alumna members and undergraduate members/alumna members.

Undergraduate, while also a noun, is used as an adjective here. Think of this example when deciding the correct use of “alumna” or “alumnae.” In all cases, use “alumna” when it is immediately followed by a noun.

Too, keep in mind the difference between “collegiate” and “collegian,” which also find their roots in Latin.

“Collegiate” is the adjective; “collegian” is the noun. Therefore, “*We are collegiate members.*” Or, “*Mary and Jane are collegians.*” Never, “*Mary and Jane are collegiates.*” (My grammar check just underlined collegiates as incorrect, because it is not a noun.)

Exception: “alumnae association.” If we were truly to follow “Miss Will’s” brilliant knowledge of Latin, it would be “alumna association.” Incorrect usage through the years has now caused this to be acceptable.

Alumnus – male singular; alumni – male plural.

The same rules apply for the use of these words as the above.

Hopefully, this is helpful. When in doubt, always use the [Kappa Kappa Gamma Style Guide](#).