



House Rules

Fraternities and Sororities Adapt to New Initiation Policies

When Bob Steinbach '54 was a young president of the Alpha Gamma Nu fraternity, he would look at the alumni from the 1930's and wonder if he'd ever get as old as those guys. Now celebrating the 50th anniversary of his own graduation, Steinbach laughs when he thinks about how he must look to active Gamma Nus today.

"They must think I'm ancient," he joked at the Alumni Association Awards Dinner in May, at which he received the "R" Award for Presidential Service.

No matter his age, a Gamma Nu is always a Gamma Nu, Steinbach said. It's a bond that connects 20-year-old members today with the guys who drove to campus in Model Ts.

That's one reason he and many other Redlands Greek alumni are seeking to understand the university's efforts over the past year to strictly enforce its anti-hazing policy.

The policy was crafted several years ago as an attempt to bring student organizations into compliance with the legal limitations on initiation activities. The policy promotes positive team-building activities instead of humiliating and harmful pranks. It prohibits any activity that degrades, humiliates or harms—whether physically or emotionally—another person. Penalties for violating the policy depend on the severity of the infraction, ranging from probation to revocation of the chapter.

The policy affects every student organization from church groups to athletic teams, but it has the greatest impact on the 12-house Greek system, which has been forced to revamp traditions intended to build brotherhood and sisterhood among members.

Over the past several months, the university has sanctioned three fraternities and two sororities for

BY LOUISE AHERN

hazing violations ranging from depriving new members of adequate sleep, to humiliating new members for getting answers wrong on weekly tests. At the same time, the university has hosted several educational events to teach students and alumni about more positive new member activities.

Confusion about the efforts and their timing prompted many Greek alumni to call the offices of Alumni Relations and Student Life with concerns about the scope of the anti-hazing policy and what they perceive to be a threat to their bonding traditions.

"I have heard from a number of people who don't understand what all the fuss is about," said Alumni Relations Director Sharilyn Bailey '87, an alumna of the Delta Kappa Psi sorority. "And there is a sense by some that the entire Greek system is going to break down because of these new rules."

University officials say alumni fears are understandable but unwarranted. They hope to sort rumor from fact, and explain what the anti-hazing policy means and does not mean.

A Changing World

"We are not out to get the Greek system," said Char Burgess '69 '70, vice president and dean of students. She's also a Delta alumna.

"Number one, this policy applies to all student organizations," she said. "But more importantly, we recognize that the Greek system for 100 years has provided opportunities for students to expand their friendship circles and to experience a group that, for some students, is a stronger bond than they have with their own families. I think the Greek system is more critical now than ever."

However, the Greek system needs to adapt to a changing world, Burgess said. Gone are the days when forced keg stands and panty-raids can be laughed off as harmless high jinks. Gone, too, are the days when the demands of joining a Greek organization should be so great that students feel pressured to blow off their class work, Burgess said.

Why?

For one thing, students today are much different than students even just a decade ago. They grew up in the wake of tragedies, such as the string of school shootings in the late 1990s, that taught parents and children to report things that make them feel uncomfortable.

"Students today have no problem coming forward and telling the administration about the activities they

feel violate a policy, especially after we have told them that they will not be hazed," Burgess said. "This new generation of students comes from a consequence-based childhood and has little loyalty to these pledging practices that once seemed acceptable. Some of what has gone on has in fact discouraged pledging."

Greek Tragedies

If students are different, so is the legal environment now faced by universities and Greek organizations. Consider this:

■ In the past four years alone, ten college students from across the country have died during so-called harmless pledging traditions. In many of those cases, members of the Greek organizations were criminally charged or have been sued by the victims' parents. Even at the University of California, Riverside—the closest UC campus to Redlands—a fraternity was recently suspended after a new member ended up in the hospital with internal injuries caused by a pledging prank.

■ Strict anti-hazing laws have been passed in nearly every U.S. state; one of the toughest is in California. The University of Redlands policy is based largely on state law, which defines hazing broadly as any "method of initiation or pre-initiation ... likely to cause bodily danger, physical harm, or personal degradation or disgrace resulting in physical or men-

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tal harm ..." Anyone convicted of violating the law faces a \$5,000 fine and a year in jail.

■ New laws have paved the way for criminal charges against students who take part in hazing activities, as well as civil litigation by hazing victims and their families. In one recent case, the family of a Cal State Los Angeles student who drowned while pledging Alpha Kappa Alpha filed a \$100 million lawsuit against the national sorority. (The sorority maintained that it was not affiliated with the chapter in question.)

The University of Redlands is not alone in its efforts. Nationwide, colleges, universities, and national Greek organizations have started cracking down on the "Animal House" types of behaviors that have become commonplace in the initiation process.

In fact, the University of Redlands policy is modeled after the anti-hazing measures adopted by national Greek organizations and which are recommended by the Fraternal Insurance Purchasing Group, a consortium of Greek-lettered groups that establish risk-management practices.

Burgess argues that rather than weakening the Greek system, the anti-hazing policy is the key to its future.

Greek membership at the University of Redlands has declined sharply over the past three years. Since 2000, there has been a 13.7 percent drop in the Greek population despite a 29 percent spike in the university's undergraduate population.

Interviews with students who have dropped out of the Greek system suggest that hazing plays a large role in a student's decision to join or leave, Burgess said.

"Dozens of organizations across the country are stronger than even ours, and they don't have hazing," Burgess said. "We're doing this so our Greek organizations can last another 100 years."

How Hazing Starts

The University of Redlands has thankfully been spared the kinds of tragedies seen at other universities. But, Burgess wonders, does the university have to wait for someone to die or suffer life-threatening injuries before establishing an anti-hazing climate?

Not according to Judge Mitch Crane, a national anti-

hazing expert who recently spoke at the university.

He demonstrates it this way: Say you meet the woman of your dreams and decide to propose, he said. As you're kneeling with a ring, you tell her that before you can get married, she has to chug a six-pack and then run around the house in her underwear.

Make sense? Of course not.

And Crane's point with that hypothetical example is not what you probably think.

In today's society, everyone likely agrees that the behavior described above is not acceptable. The most challenging part of establishing a hazing-free environment is convincing everyone that it's the more subtle kinds of hazing that are the most prevalent and potentially dangerous, he said.

WHAT IS HAZING?

The University of Redlands anti-hazing policy prohibits any activity that degrades, humiliates or harms—whether physically or emotionally—another person. Penalties for violating the policy depend on the severity of the infraction, ranging from probation to revocation of the chapter.

The policy applies to all student groups, from academic clubs to sports teams. But it has had the biggest impact—and caused the greatest stir—within the university's 12-house Greek system. Many students and alumni fear that the university's enforcement efforts over the past year will ruin longstanding traditions that forge bonds among members.

The biggest area of contention lies in the definition of hazing. What one person considers demeaning or harmful might not seem as such to another person.

What is hazing? Several broad definitions exist.

Hazing is any activity with no educational purpose, said national anti-hazing expert Judge Mitch Crane, a Pennsylvania lawyer who speaks to college students across the country.

"Take away the things that have no relevance or that are dangerous," Crane said. "Then ask instead what activities you can do to teach your members the things they need to learn. What is it that will make them a good member of your fraternity or sorority? Hazing doesn't make them better brothers or sisters. You can make someone respect you without hazing."

California state law, which the University of Redlands

anti-hazing policy is based upon, defines hazing as any "method of initiation or pre-initiation ... likely to cause bodily danger, physical harm, or personal degradation or disgrace resulting in physical or mental harm ..."

To help students understand what types of activities meet that definition, the University of Redlands compiled a comprehensive list of programs and activities that are prohibited.

However, university officials say it's important to understand that activities can be revamped to meet the new rules. For example, blindfolding is listed as a prohibited activity. But if a sorority uses blindfolding in Ropes Course activities such as trust walks and trust falls, then the Office of Student Leadership and Involvement might approve the activity.

Among the activities considered hazing and now prohibited are:

■ Activities that subject a student to psychological harm or emotional strain or cause embarrassment. This includes the use of the term "pledge," or any activity such as a line-up or a test that results in humiliation if a student doesn't perform up to par. This may seem extreme, but in both cases these are low level activities which have been cited in court cases as "contributing" to an environment that allows more major hazing to occur, said Char Burgess, vice president and dean of students.

■ Forcing new members to do anything exclusively for the entertainment of the organization members.

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—Brian Murphy, a Phi Sigma Tau and president of the Interfraternity Council.

■ Forcing or permitting students to disrupt their class schedules or neglect their academics; creating activities so demanding and time-consuming that a student's academic performance suffers.

■ All forms of physical activity not part of an organized athletic contest and not specifically directed toward constructive work.

■ Any activity, such as a scavenger hunt, that will result in illegal activity. Included in this are new member "ditches," kidnaps, and blindfolding.

■ Denying new members adequate sleep.

■ Paddling, swatting or spanking.

■ Depriving students of regular hygiene, such as access to showers.

■ Forced nudity.

■ Forcing, coercing or permitting students to drink excessive amounts of alcohol.

■ Any form of punishment or demerit system.

■ Forcing new members to run errands for returning organization members.

■ Assigning pranks, such as stealing, painting objects, or harassing another team or organization.

■ Not providing decent or edible food.

For more information on the definition of hazing or the kinds of activities that meet the definition, visit www.stophazing.org.



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"Hazing builds upon itself," he said. "If I tell you this year that you have to do 15 push-ups to get in, next year you might think that was too easy and make the new members do 30. You make it worse each time."

In other words, small hazing becomes big hazing. That's why the University of Redlands policy leaves no wiggle room, Burgess said. Calling someone a "pledge" today creates a climate of degradation that could lead to other offenses tomorrow. She said the only way to ensure a healthy environment is to ban all activities that could lead to humiliation, emotional strain, or physical harm.

Is All Hazing Bad?

But can you do that without ruining Greek traditions?

"My first reaction was that they were pretty much gutting the pledging process," said Chad Norton '82, president of the Alumni Board of Directors and an Alpha Gamma Nu alumna. "Fraternalities and sororities are invitation-only organizations. There are certain criteria for membership."

Many alumni like Norton remember their own pledging days and can't help but wonder why the university apparently now considers their experiences to have been degrading, humiliating or life-threatening. Norton certainly doesn't consider himself emotionally scarred because of his pledging process.

"When I was in the middle of it, I didn't particularly enjoy it," he said. "But it did a lot for me physically and emotionally. There was a bond there."

Norton said that many alumni fear that the current policy goes too far in the name of "political correctness" and threatens to strip fraternalities and sororities of important bonding activities.

Example: The policy bans line-ups as a way to test whether new members have learned the organization's songs, credo and history. In its traditional implementa-

tion, a line-up requires new members to stand before active members and answer questions. A wrong answer often results in some kind of punishment or reprimand.

Alumni wonder how the Greek organizations are supposed to ensure that important historical information such as songs that bind generation to generation will be carried on if they can't force new members to learn them through techniques such as line-ups.

"Where do you draw the line?" Norton asked. "How do you determine what is demeaning or embarrassing for each individual?"

Burgess said that's where zero-tolerance comes in. "The law doesn't allow us the latitude to leave it up to personal judgment," Burgess said. "It has to be black and white. And, frankly, are you telling me that the only way to build commitment from your members is

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to haze them? I don't think so."

There are alumni out there who agree.

Katie Cure Hernandez '97, president of the Alumni for Greeks, said there is no place in the new member process for hazing.

"There are other ways to bond," said Hernandez, an Alpha Theta Phi alumna who was honored in May with the Ray Whitmus Award for Outstanding Young Alumni. "From my experience, there were a lot of things that I didn't think were necessary."

She adds, however, "I'm a stronger person because of my pledging process. By the end I was my own person. But I recognize that what made me a stronger person might have broken someone else's spirit."

What students say

The policy has put current students in an awkward position, said Brian Murphy '04, a member of Phi Sigma Tau and president of the Interfraternity Council.

On one side, they face the rules and penalties of the university, Murphy said. On the other side, they face the anger of alumni who worry that the current students aren't fighting hard enough to protect their traditions.

The result? A mixed bag of acceptance and fear.

"If fraternalities and sororities continue to ignore the policies, I'm sure it will mean the demise of the Greek system," Murphy warned. "But there have been a lot of concerns. I think any time there is a lot of change too quickly, people will be taken by surprise. Some members accept it, but others think it will be a problem for the pledging process."

Alumni can play an important role in this effort, said Bailey, alumni relations director. It will be easier for students to grasp the new rules if alumni make an effort to do so, too.

A Greek alumna herself, Bailey said it took her a long time to realize that the policy does allow for flexibility.

"I would encourage alumni working with their particular student group to look at the traditions they feel are important and to discuss them with the Student Life staff," Bailey said. "If Student Life isn't surprised by something, and if you can make an argument that what you're doing isn't demeaning, is instead part of team-building and does serve a purpose, they actually have been far more flexible than they are getting credit for."

What it Means to be Greek

At its core, the university's anti-hazing policy asks students to consider the true meaning of Greek membership.

In a memo from the Office of Student Life in

February 2004, university officials made it clear that hazing activities do not meet the ideals of fraternity and sorority life.

"We are very concerned about the individual safety of our members," said the memo, which followed the sanctioning of five Greek organizations for hazing violations. "Our students are losing sleep, being reprimanded, not eating, getting sick, missing class ... all to join organizations that stand for brother/sisterhood, scholarship, and community service. These groups have important goals and ideals...But, currently, we are not living up to these beliefs."

Hernandez said members of her sorority now ask themselves when evaluating new member activities, "What did our founding members plan for us? What are the key traditions and elements? The key characteristics and values they expected members to uphold?"

"By doing that, we're focusing on the main elements to develop a Theta who meets our motto: character, companionship, and culture," she said.

Crane points out that hazing has not always been part of Greek life. He said hazing did not seep into fraternity and sorority rituals until after World War II,

when GIs fresh from boot camp or the battle field brought a military mentality to college with them.

"Hazing doesn't make them better brothers or sisters," Crane said.

And that's how Norton said he came back to "the middle" on the issue. He recalled going back to his fraternity house at Homecoming and meeting a new member.

"I was disappointed at first to realize that he didn't have to do certain things," Norton said. "But five minutes later, I was talking to him about his classes and the football team, and suddenly it was OK."

"The tradition you remember only matters to the group you share that memory with," he said. "At the end of the day, pledging is just a process. No matter what that is, there is a common bond that develops by going through any process together."

Ultimately, alumni will come to accept the new rules, Norton said. But it's going to take patience and clear communication.

"This is going to take a while," he said. "The Gamma Nus have been around since 1923. You can't change that in a year." **OT**

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