

Fraternities, sororities opting against hazing at UNC

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Imagine running nude up a flight of stairs with an olive between your buttock cheeks.

Welcome to your fraternity. This is an extreme example, but during pledge semesters at many college campuses across the United States, this would not be unusual. In the name of bonding and brotherhood, friendship and fun, students who wish to pledge fraternities or sororities are often subjected to such activities.

In the past, hazing has meant drinking while locked in the trunk of a car, running naked through the streets, being hurled into a lake or being beaten with a wooden beam.

And even dying. Forty-three students across the country reportedly died from hazing-related incidents between 1978 and 1988. Many additional hazing deaths may have been listed as accidents.

As a result, national Greek organizations have been cracking down on hazing, making it a punishable offense. In addition, the national organizations for all-black fraternities and sororities met this summer and eliminated the tradition of going "on line."

Being "on line" includes such activities as eating together, wearing clothes that look identical to the other pledges' clothes and spending all time not spent in class with the fraternity or sorority. It also includes marching in line, singing and possibly giving up something.

Many states have outlawed hazing as well. Since the 1912 hazing death of Isaac William Rand, a UNC student, North Carolina has made it illegal to "annoy any student by playing abusive or ridiculous tricks upon him, to frighten, scold, beat or harass him, or subject him to personal indignity."

But hazing still occurs on this campus, said Kari Howe, Panhellenic Council president. She couldn't give specific examples, however, because the only proof of hazing comes from people who turn in a brother or sister. No one is going to do that, she said.

Just for the Fun of It

Greeks are divided on the hazing issue. "Hazing is a terrible thing," Howe said. "The ideal is no hazing on any campus."

Robb Beatty, Inter-Fraternity Council president, agreed. "There is no place for hazing. I don't see anything positive in hazing at all," he said.

One fraternity member, who wished to remain anonymous, voiced another opinion.

"Call me a masochist, but I enjoyed the hell out of it," said Sam (not his real name).

He said that two years ago he was hazed while pledging. He and his pledge brothers had their rears signed in indelible ink by sorority sisters, drank Wild Irish Rose wine at room temperature, acted as waiters at parties and stole a Christmas tree.

"We did what they asked. It wasn't that unreasonable."

He described the last hazing he endured, which occurred while he and other pledges waited for their initiation to start: "We stripped down to our underwear. I had maxi pads taped on me that were colored on. River water was poured over me and I sat in a room with really obnoxious music. The ritual took 45 minutes per person and there were seven of us." It was December, and he sat for three hours and 45 minutes dressed in only wet underwear, awaiting his turn.

But he came out of his initiation believing that the brothers who had orchestrated his pledge semester were ingenious. "Everything that had been a mystery all semester made sense. I knew that the other 54 guys in that house had done what I had done. I wouldn't have traded my experience for anything."

Melodie Griffith, Black Greek Council president and member of Delta Sigma Theta sorority, agreed. Although she said she was not hazed, she said the experiences she had while "on line" meant a lot to her and her fellow pledges once they were over.

"When 'on line,' she never knew what was going to happen the next day; that was all part of the secrecy and tradition involved in the pledging process.

Going "on line" is not hazing, Griffith said, because she defines hazing as being subjected to something against your will. "Everyone walks 'on line' because they want to, not because they have to," she said.

The Panhellenic Council defines hazing in a different way. They have issued a list of activities that they consider hazing and that are forbidden at all sororities. The list disallows giving of demerits, causing a lack of sleep, withholding information from pledges and keeping them in cold rooms. It also forbids activities that may seem harmless but that have been deemed potentially degrading or dangerous, such as treasure hunts, road trips, calling a pledge "pledge" instead of her name or making a pledge answer the door or phone.

Seeing Through the Haze

But according to Sam, hazing has its purposes. It bonds people together like no other experience can. "Going to the beach is bonding," he said, "but you are not forced to cope with a bad situation."

Learning to work together to overcome an obstacle makes people closer than anything else, he said. "It's easy to work a pledge class into a fraternity, but harder to work seven strangers into each other."

Hazing teaches lessons that are valuable in life, too,

Sam said. When pledging, members learn to be leaders and followers, he said. They learn to do what they are told and to organize within their pledge class in order to meet goals in the most efficient way. They also must learn to retain their integrity — just like in the real world.

A pledge who has been hazed has earned his way into the fraternity, Sam said. "If I do this for one semester," he explained, "I'll have an indentured servant for the rest of college. You do your work at first and earn your way in."

But even Sam admitted that hazing can get out of hand. "People should be worried (about hazing in fraternities). When people worry, it keeps things in perspective. It should be kept out in the open."

"If I had to make the rules, I would make them just like my hazing experience — no one was hurt and it was not too strenuous. If hazing could be done right, I would not only not condemn it, I would condone it."

Griffith had similar comments about her semester of pledging. She said going "on line" was about building unity, learning to work with other people and learning about yourself. She said that the 11 women she pledged with are now some of her closest friends.

"Pledging makes you a support system. There were nights when I was tired of walking, I knew there was someone walking in front of me and someone behind me. I knew I couldn't stop walking."

Krista Lutz, member of a UNC sorority, said there is a distinction between harmful hazing and fun hazing.

"I've heard that pledges have to wear bras on the outside of their shirt, maxi pads for name tags and have their weight written on their forehead by a frat," she said.

Lutz considers that to be dangerous, degrading hazing, but some activities that are considered hazing are just silly, she added. Hazing, she said, does have a purpose in bonding sisters.

"Some of it (hazing) just makes them appreciate things. Everyone at some time in their life has been a pledge."

Yet she said these arguments do not justify hazing. "Hazing should be outlawed," she said. "It's one of those rules that's all or nothing. Hazing is different for different people — it's hard to distinguish what is degrading for each person."

Replacing the Rituals

In keeping with national regulations and state laws, local chapters are trying to eliminate hazing as well.

According to Ken Pilla, rush chairman for Lambda Chi Alpha fraternity, "We're militant about that (not hazing). It's against our national policy and we uphold that."

Pilla said he could understand the argument behind hazing, but that people take it too far. There are better ways to bond, he said. His fraternity advocates the bonding of all brothers instead of bonding within a pledge class.

The Lambda Chi Alpha fraternity nationals have implemented a program in which all new members are called associate members instead of pledges. They are not required to do anything that the brothers don't do, but Pilla said he considers his brothers to be just as loyal (if not more so) as they would have been if they had been hazed.

Alyson Grine, pledge educator for Delta Delta Delta, said her sorority also strongly discourages hazing. "That is not the way our pledge program is run at all. Any instance of hazing is a misunderstanding."

Mike Ferguson, president of Sigma Nu fraternity, said his nationals began an alternative to traditional pledge practices, a program called the Leadership and Ethics Achievement Development (LEAD). This program is still developing, but currently consists of weekly meetings in which the pledges explore their areas of leadership, hear from speakers and learn Sigma Nu history.

The importance of pledging is gaining knowledge about the history of the house and getting to know the brothers, he said, and these two things are incorporated into the LEAD program. Sigma Nu nationals are calling for the LEAD program eventually to take over any existing pledge programs.

Reginald Wilkerson, Southern regional assistant vice-president for Alpha Phi Alpha fraternity, said black fraternities do not release information about the pledge process unless someone is rushing.

He did say, however, that after this summer's meeting, pledges will no longer go "on line."

"The process of going 'on line' is null and void," he said.

Wilkerson said hazing has occurred within the black Greek system before, but that he is 99 percent sure that this fall's changes will stop hazing within the system.

Brenda Campbell, programming chairwoman for the Panhellenic Council, said many pledge activities can be preserved if they are approached differently. "You can do some activities in a positive way and that's not hazing. Do it in a negative way, and that is hazing."

She said the bonding experience that comes from hazing can be replaced with positive activities and may be an even better experience. "The purpose behind any kind of pledge program ... is to bond girls together, to make them feel special. But if a girl objects to what's going on ... that's what you don't want."

Thomas Williams, one of three rush chairmen for the Chi Psi fraternity, agreed with Campbell. "Our initiation process is less of an ordeal and more of a process of welcoming new pledges into brotherhood. There is no need to humiliate them, and they don't have to prove themselves."



Hazing is a negative way of accomplishing a desirable end, he said.

Teachers, Not Spies

Beyond the changes taking place within specific houses, the Panhellenic Council and the Inter-Fraternity Council are sponsoring programs to bring about changes that will affect all Greeks at UNC.

Howe said she doesn't want the Panhellenic Council to have to send in spies, so the council is replacing policing with educating.

Through a forum on hazing awareness, the Panhellenic Council hopes to clarify the types of activities that are considered hazing. The forum will also suggest punishments for hazing.

Campbell said the goal of the program was for the Greek system to educate itself without administrators breathing down its neck.

The only way to correct the problem is to start from the bottom, Campbell said, with the pledges.

"The sisters were probably hazed somewhere along the line and they thought it was fun. They have no problem with doing it again. We want to let them know what they (the pledges) can say yes to and what they can say no to. There are some aspects of hazing that are really bad going on on this campus."

Pledge trainers representing each sorority met to discuss activities that would be fun and unifying without being humiliating or unsafe. The Panhellenic Council suggests throwing a surprise breakfast, going on a hayride or camping.

Campbell said writing letters to or meeting with alumnae unites the girls with the history of their sorority. She said when pledges organize a mixer for the members, they bond through working together as a team.

Beatty said he has met with the council and explicitly declared three things: that the Inter-Fraternity Council in no way condones hazing, that hazing does not benefit anyone and that hazing is a violation of student and civil courts.

"IFC is setting the record straight right away. Every week we'll try to do a little more," Beatty said.

He said plans for the fall include the Inter-Fraternity Council's working with the Panhellenic Council on its hazing forum and visits to each fraternity house by the assistant attorney general for the Undergraduate Student Court to explain hazing.

Just as Howe and Campbell did, Beatty emphasized the importance of the Greek system's reforming its own pledge programs.

"Frats have to change now before someone comes in and changes for them."

Daily Tar Heel Informal Survey

From now on, the Focus page will run monthly, addressing controversial issues and featuring student opinions gleaned from informal DTH surveys. We would appreciate it if you would take the time to fill out this survey, adding whatever comments you wish. Please drop them off in the designated box outside the Daily Tar Heel office. If we can contact you for additional information, please leave your name and number.

Year _____
Major _____

1) Have you heard any part of 2 Live Crew's album *As Nasty As They Wanna Be*?

a) yes
b) no

2) If so, do you find the lyrics offensive?

a) yes
b) no

3) If so, do you think it should be prohibited from being sold?

a) yes
b) no

4) Even if you haven't heard the album, do you think its sale

should be prohibited?

a) yes
b) no

5) Why or why not?

6) Do you think you can make a fair judgment without hearing the lyrics?

a) yes
b) no

7) Why or why not?

8) What role do you think local, state or national government should play in the censorship of musical lyrics?

9) Do you feel the same about censorship of literature and visual arts?

a) yes
b) no

10) Why or why not?

11) How do you think book banning affects or has affected your education?

12) Do you think the government is within its rights to withhold funding from art projects they deem obscene, explicit, etc.?

a) yes
b) no

13) Why or why not?

14) Do you think rating and/or labeling albums constitutes censorship?

a) yes
b) no

15) Why or why not?

16) Do you think that labeling an album will have any effect on its sales?

a) yes
b) no

17) Why or why not?

18) To what extent do you think artists and musicians should be held accountable for controversial material?

19) Do you think censorship is a widespread problem?

a) yes
b) no

20) Do you think censorship is a larger problem in the South than in other parts of the country?

a) yes
b) no

21) Why or why not?

22) Do you think censorship is acceptable in any degree? In other words, is censorship ever necessary?

a) yes
b) no

23) Why or why not?