C.U. Fraternity Suspended for Hazing

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  • [4]
  • [5]
  • [6]
  • [7]
  • [8]

March 26, 2007
By Tom Scherer [9]

The Lambda Theta Phi fraternity remains on temporary suspension pending review, and a former Cornell student faces charges in the aftermath of a one-month-old hazing incident involving various members the Cornell community.

The incident, which took place on the evening of Feb. 23, began when the pledges of Lambda Theta Phi organized themselves in what is known as battle position — hugging each other in a line and squatting. Fraternity brothers than charged at the pledges. In his voluntary statement, a Cornell student and Lambda Theta Phi pledge related that he was removed from the group by Eric Perez, a student at LeMoyne College, and smashed into a sheet rock wall which shattered on impact.

The student stated that he was then placed in a pitch-black room with two other pledges; brother Gilberto Anthony Gomez entered and said that the pledges could leave after they had been slapped across the front of the face. Gomez then allegedly slapped the student and allowed him to leave; the student stated that he later heard Gomez bragging about slapping other pledges multiple times.

The Ithaca Police Department charged Gomez and Perez with second-degree hazing and second-degree harassment, both violation level crimes, which are less serious than misdemeanors. Perez pleaded guilty
to the harassment charge and the hazing charge was dropped, resulting in a $250 fine. Gomez will appear in court on March 28.

The Cornell University Police declared both Gomez and Perez personas non grata, meaning that they will be arrested for trespassing if found on Cornell grounds.

In response to a reported hazing incident, the Office of Fraternity and Sorority Affairs put Lambda Theta Phi on temporary suspension as of Feb. 27, effectively halting all fraternity events. According to Travis Apgar, associate dean of students for fraternity and sorority affairs, this was done to prevent further opportunities for hazing to occur within the organization.

The suspension will remain in effect until Lambda Theta Phi comes before Cornell’s Fraternity and Sorority Review Board. The Board will then decide the chapter’s future status and determine what counseling or education the fraternity needs as well as whether any disciplinary action should be taken.

“We work very hard to educate the fraternity and sorority community on hazing issues in an ongoing basis,” Apgar said.

The last violation documented on Cornell’s online list of hazing incidents took place in the spring of 2006.

As Ithaca College students are also affiliated with the fraternity, their administration is also looking into the matter. I.C. spokesman Dave Maley told the Ithaca Journal, “our public safety office is investigating the possibility that some of our students may have been involved in hazing activities in campus housing.”

Aside from the incident that led to the charges, other instances of hazing during the pledging process were also described. According to the statement, the pledges were not allowed to speak to anyone but family, faculty and fraternity members as part of a social probation, known as the vow of silence.

During physical fitness nights, pledges were required to repeat fraternity sayings, some of which included racial slurs, the student stated; the brothers also repeatedly threatened the pledges with physical violence — one brother threatened to kick a pledge in the face if he failed to memorize a certain phrase. According to the student's statement, during the entire pledge week, the pledges were never given the eight hours of sleep they were guaranteed, and one night they only got two hours of rest.

Chapter President Anthony Lopez declined to comment on the incident. Byron Bustos, national president of Lambda Theta Phi, stated in an email, “Lambda Theta Phi is fully cooperating with Cornell University and local authorities and hopes to resolve this situation shortly.”

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