IFC Continues Hazing Investigation

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Cornell’s Greek community is continuing its investigation into two widely-reported allegations of hazing this semester involving Alpha Delta Phi and Pi Kappa Alpha. While the Greek Judicial Board is still hearing the case of Alpha Delta Phi, a public announcement on the fate of Pi Kappa Alpha is expected within the next two weeks.

“We learned a lot from these incidents and are moving forward,” IFC President Allen Miller ’11 said.

Miller also noted that both cases were unique because of the media coverage that has surrounded them.

Under Miller’s term, the IFC has sought to increase transparency by instating reports by the Vice President of Judicial Affairs at weekly meetings that detail ongoing investigations and punishments without divulging the names of the fraternities in question.

“We want chapters to know the consequences of violations without compromising the privacy of those involved,” Miller said.

Associate Dean of Students Travis Apgar said he has been pleased with the efforts of the IFC to promote transparency. He has suggested similar policies since coming to Cornell from Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, where he was Senior Judicial Administrator.

Investigations into reports of hazing are comprehensive and can result in many different forms of response, according to Apgar.

“We start by conducting fact-finding, and if hazing did occur we proceed in one of three ways depending on the severity of the incident,” he said.

During the fact-finding process, representatives from the Office of Fraternity and Sorority Affairs start by interviewing people mentioned in the allegation or expected to have firsthand information and call new members and representatives of the organization involved if necessary.

Reports of hazing are often made anonymously through hazing.cornell.edu, a resource provided by the OFSA. Apgar noted that the fact-finding process is easier when the reporter of the incident provides contact information.

“Often, the report will contain a temporary or anonymous email address,” he said. “We can then follow up with the person and get more detailed information to assist the investigation.”

If it is determined that hazing did occur, the organization can be dealt with in one of three ways.

Incidents that are considered to be the least severe are dealt with informally. In this case, the Vice President of Judicial Affairs of the relevant council discusses the incident and response with the chapter president.

Cases deemed to be more severe are dealt with by the Greek Judicial Board. Composed of student representatives from each of the three governing councils — the Interfraternity Council, Panhellenic Council, and the Multicultural Greek Letter Council — the board hears cases and then comes to a decision on a sanction. Possible sanctions include a warning, social probation, fines and disciplinary probation. According to Miller, the board should hear the case of Alpha Delta Phi by the end of the semester.

The most severe allegations of chapter misconduct, such as those of Pi Kappa Alpha, are referred to the Fraternity and Sorority Review Board. The FRSB determines whether the University will continue to recognize that chapter in question.

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“A decision has been made, but we still need to confirm with [Vice President of Student and Academic Services] Susan Murphy, Pike Kappa Alpha’s national organization, their alumni group and student leaders before making an announcement,” Miller said. Miller declined to say what decision has been made.

Allegations of hazing at Cornell have garnered widespread media attention this year. Particularly, popular gossip blog Ivygate has prominently featured reports of the allegations, with stories being picked up by popular blogs such as Gawker and The Huffington Post. To the memory of both Miller and Apgar, this is the first time Cornell fraternity incidents have been so aggressively covered by the media.

“This hasn’t been good press, and it puts everyone on edge,” Miller said. “We need to be safe and careful while having fun, and increased transparency in investigations reinforces this.”

Apgar stressed the incidents were isolated and not reflective of the strides the Greek community has made in transparency and accountability.

“The Greek community is the easiest target to have these types of attitudes toward,” he said. “Statistics show hazing is just as common in some other types of student organizations, such as athletic teams.”

He also stated that while the Alpha Delta Phi allegations were first publically disclosed by Ivygate, they were simultaneously reported to the OFSA through hazing.cornell.edu. The Ivygate stories were not the basis of the investigation nor were they consulted as part of it. Miller said that Ivygate was not involved in the investigation, and would not comment on the veracity of its reports.

“Media outlets such as Ivygate sensationalize for the reader,” Apgar said.

The negative media attention has not had an impact on either investigation, and both Apgar and Miller said the system in place has been successful.

“We have come a long way as a community,” Miller said. “I am really happy with the progress we have made.”

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