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By Archives

Results of a new study appear in the March-April issue of American Journal of Health Behavior that investigated the occurrences and issues related to hazing at Cornell. The study reported that 6.7 percent of students had been a hazer in the past while 12.4 percent reported they had been hazed by someone else.

Over 700 undergraduates completed a survey about the prevalence of hazing within the Cornell community. There was a 37 percent response rate for the online hazing survey. Shelly Campo, an assistant professor at the University of Iowa, conducted the study at Cornell and believes that hazing is a prevalent issue on many college campuses nationwide. "Approximately one in three students reported being involved in 'hazing activities' on Cornell's campus," Campo said.

Hazing is prohibited by the Cornell Campus Code of Conduct, the Fraternity and Sorority Judicial Code and New York State Law.

http://cornellsun.com/print/14089
According to the fraternity and sorority advisory council's annual report, there were eleven complaints to the judicial board of hazing reported between 2003 and 2004. Changes in the social policy and system-wide education led to a decrease in social violations between 2002-2003 and 2003-2004.

"The InterFraternity Council, Panhellenic Association, and Multicultural Greek Letter Council had all been making steps to educate people in the Greek system about hazing. A lot of people were inquiring about the prevalence of hazing on campus," Campo said.

"There was confusion as to what students thought was hazing and what actually meets the state law and University definitions," Campo said.

"We found hazing in all types of organizations. Students were members of the Greek system, choral groups, athletic teams etc. It did not matter what sort of organization," she added. "The essential lesson is that hazing exists in a lot of different places and exists anywhere where there is a sense of status that needs to be earned."

Campo added, "One interesting finding was that those who participated in hazing were also more likely to participate in other community service activities, volunteer work, and team-building activities."

Campo suggested that students who are leaders in other non-hazing organizations probably take leadership roles in their hazing-organization as well.

No studies have been conducted to investigate the prevalence and nature of hazing among college students nationwide.

This study at Cornell is probably the third major study in the U.S. done on hazing. Campo worked with Gretchen Poulos '03 on this research project.

"[Campo] and I built on the existing knowledge that we obtained about hazing to understand how hazing works and how we could influence people to make positive choices within their organization," Poulos said. "We asked students about their belief and attitudes toward hazing; we tried to figure out what makes people join organizations that haze."

"A lot of people who are hazed actually don't realize that they are hazed. They don't identify their experience as being hazed and therefore do not think that hazing can be a destructive act," Poulos added.

Poulos and Campo agree that the identification of hazing is one the first steps in getting people to change.

"I think that it really hit home for me how important friends are. People who are hazed usually need a friend outside of that organization to give them new perspectives on how to deal, and to assist in providing help for the individual," Poulos said.

"I think the biggest thing that we derived from the study was that we really need to educate people about hazing. We have finally begun to turn this matter into a number of initiatives such as educating the Greek system in more ways, putting up the hazing website, and beginning a poster campaign to stop hazing activities on campus," she said.

Suzy Nelson, associate dean of students, fraternity and sorority affairs, has been working extensively with Cornell administration and other organizations on an anti-hazing campaign. Nelson said, "Hazing is a by-product of group affiliation especially if you have to prove your worth to the organization. It is definitely an inherent problem in our society and one important question we must ask is: how do we turn around this culture?"
She added, "Cornell is fully aware that hazing can be linked to both fraternities and sororities. However, a committee has been formed to discuss hazing policies and study the Greek and athletic community, as well as other student organizations."

Hazing may foster unity among members but with costs.

"It may provide members with a sense of accomplishment, commitment, and dedication to the organization. However, performing tasks for your organization should be purposeful, not mindless," Nelson said. "Hazing shows a strong disregard for fellow students."

"We have seen men conduct more physical acts of hazing such as binge drinking and physical beatings. Women play mind games, make their new members feel uncomfortable, and lower self esteem," Nelson said.

"I am not surprised that students who engaged in hazing activities were also more likely to experience positive team-building activities. These students like to be involved in positive, social groups. Greeks, for example, are smart, organized, and effective leaders. They know how to self-govern their organization, but hazing can be the dark side that they may cross over to."

A new website, hazing.cornell.edu, will be launched later this semester to allow visitors to learn about hazing at Cornell, report hazing incidents, explore alternative organization-building activities and find out what people can do to prevent hazing. The site is a resource for students, staff and alumni.

Examples of the wide range of hazing activities that have occurred in past years will be available to view on the site as well.

"This website is a courageous attempt to show the Cornell community that we do not promote any form of hazing. Cornell is one of the only schools that will publicly list the organizations that have hazed in the past," Nelson said.

The "Sunshine Policy" allows any chapters that are found to be in violation of the hazing policy to have their name and details of the incident posted on the website. However, chapters that self-disclose acts of hazing to judicial officials and re-structure their programs will not be subject to the "Sunshine Policy."

Archived article by Allison Markowitz
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Study Finds Discrepancy In Perceptions of Hazing