

## FACTS AND FALLACIES OF HAZING

### Objective:

- To educate chapter members on the facts and fallacies about hazing and the potential criminal/civil liability involved.
- To aid members in the decision making process to determine whether an activity is helpful or harmful
- To show how situations deemed harmless can become life altering for all involved.

### Preparation:

Approximately two weeks before the presentation of the program, the Education Director will meet with the Education Committee to plan the program presentation. You will need one program facilitator and one person to write the answers on the board/paper. The materials needed for the presentation are the following: Chalk Board or flipchart, enough handouts for each member, contract for all members to sign.

Included with this education program is a poem and a handout entitled, "But if We Eliminate this Activity". Both of these should be copied and distributed to your members. You will also find enclosed a contract between your membership and your new members agreeing to treat your new members with respect and dignity and a promise to them that they will not be caused undue mental or physical distress or harm. All members and new members must sign this contract and a copy of the signed contract should then be returned with your program evaluation form.

### Program:

Read the following scenarios to your chapter members and utilize the questions at the end for discussion among your members. Possible answers are provided for you as a means of keeping the discussion moving along.

#### "A True Scenario

***The big sister says to the little sister, a new member, "We have this great activity. Go around to all the fraternity houses with this T-shirt and get signatures on it." The new member does not want to but feels that she has to. At the first fraternity house, the men require her to drink shots of tequila before they sign. The other houses do the same and she ends up clearly drunk. Worse yet, unbeknownst to anyone, she has a medical sensitivity to alcohol. She collapses and is rushed to the hospital, where she dies. Her parents are suing for wrongful death. The question is who is liable?***

#### "Who's Liable?"

- The big sister - Yes, she violated the law so she is negligent. The only question is how much she will pay in damages.

- The men who served the alcohol - Yes, they served alcohol to someone under 21 and they were hazing her. Their actions resulted in her death.
- The sorority chapter - Probably. Most likely, the chapter had a policy prohibiting hazing, and had a duty to educate its members regarding hazing and to discipline those who do haze. If the chapter had a history of not living up to this duty, and it was a “tradition “ in the chapter, the chapter will likely be liable. If the chapter has been known to take a strong anti-hazing stance and discipline members for violations, it might not be held liable for the actions of a single members, but would probably be sued.
- The fraternity chapters - Probably, for similar reasons.
- The national organizations of all groups involved - Possibly, due to the national organizations being deemed the “deep pockets”.

***“Does it make a difference that no one knew the new member has a particular sensitivity to alcohol?”***

No, due to the legal principal of “you take your victim as you find him.” It does not make a difference that you could not foresee the extent of the harm. If you caused the injury, you are responsible. This is one reason that hazing exposes both you individually and the chapter to such tremendous risk and exposure.

***“But if a person participates in these activities voluntarily, why is it hazing”***

First, the laws, which prohibit hazing, define it to include activities taken with or without the individual’s consent. Second the situation is almost always coercive, because the consequences of saying no are unpleasant, such as being denied initiation or acceptance by the group. As one attorney put it, “As a trial lawyer, let me tell you that no one, and particularly not a jury, is going to believe that the new member has consented, has agreed to be hazed. I will win that issue before a jury every time. In addition, the fact that the individual may have agreed does not relieve you of your obligation to obey the law and your duty not to put other people at risk.”

**“A True Scenario**

***The chapter holds a sisterhood activity that involves blindfolding the new members in a line up and asking questions dealing with local and national history of the sorority. Between all of the new members and all of the sisters, the room becomes extremely warm. A new member faints, hits her head and is knocked unconscious. Luckily, no major head trauma ensues for the new member, but she decides to press charges of hazing against the chapter.***

***“Who might be liable?”***

- The Vice President - Yes, for organizing the event.
- All Chapter Officers - Yes, because it was discussed and decided upon in an Officer’s meeting.

- The Chapter - Probably, because nearly all members participated.
- The National Organization – Possibly
- The University - Possibly

***“What are the consequences?”***

- Criminal prosecution of the individuals and/or the chapter, including the possibility of jail, fines and/or probation
- Civil lawsuits
- Considerable legal fees
- Possible loss of insurance coverage
- Expulsion, probation, etc., imposed by the university
- Chapter or member discipline, withdrawal of privileges, etc., imposed by the national organization
- Suspension of chapter charter or termination of individual members
- Loss of personal or chapter reputation
- Internal conflicts and resentment

**A True Scenario**

***To promote unity among the new member class, the chapter decides that all new members should be together at all times. The new members, in their need to make scheduling of all of their required classes and activities easier, decide that they cannot fit breakfast and lunch in the cafeteria in. Although all of the new members lose weight, one of them is diabetic and is seriously deprived of the meals that she needs. The new member goes into diabetic shock and then, into a coma. It is decided that she will never recover. Her parents file criminal and civil charges for physical abuse.***

***“Who Might be Liable?”***

- The Vice President - Yes, for organizing the event.
- All Chapter Officers - Yes, because it was discussed and decided upon in an Officer’s meeting.
- The Chapter – Probably
- The National Organization – Possibly
- The University – Possibly
- Virtually everyone possible would probably be named under the conspiracy theory law.

***“What dollar amount might those who are found liable be expected to pay?”***

The plaintiff usually seeks payment for:

- Medical or hospital expenses
- Funeral fees, if applicable
- Attorney’s fees

- Punitive damages
- Pain and suffering
- Projected lifetime earnings (i.e., an average of \$50,000 per year over 40 years expected life span for a total of \$2 million)

If time permits, ask members to pose any other scenarios for discussion that they may have. This is a way in which a chapter member may bring to light an activity that she feels might be hazing or that she is uncomfortable with.

**Program Follow-Up:**

Have members evaluate program. Tabulate evaluations, record on Form K-87W and send to National Headquarters monthly.

Facts and Fallacies of Hazing  
HANDOUT #1



I love you not only for what you are, but for what I am when I am with you.

I love you not only for what you have made of yourself, but for what you are making of me.

I love you because you have done more than any creed could have done to make me good, and more than any fate could have done to make me happy.

You have done it without a touch, without a word, without a sign.

You have done it by being yourself. Perhaps that is what a friend means, after all.

Facts and Fallacies of Hazing  
HANDOUT #2

**But if We Eliminate this Activity...  
(Fallacy & Fact)**

Myth: Our chapter will weaken.

Fact: It has been proven that chapters who eliminate hazing are significantly stronger, happier and more unified.

Myth: Membership must be earned.

Fact: We only extend bids to women we feel are worthy of membership and who we want to be our sister. The purpose of the new member period is a time to learn about Tri Sigma and get to know each sister, not to prove worthiness.

Myth: The new members won't bond with the chapter or develop loyalty and trust.

Fact: Bonds of friendship are built on trust and respect. How can you trust someone who has forced you to do things that are embarrassing, humiliating or harmful? Resentment follows, destroying trust and thus preventing true friendships.

Myth: The new members won't respect us.

Fact: Do we advertise hazing during rush and include pictures of it in our promotional materials, or do we lie about it? Hazing by definition is an act of disrespect. How can something built on deceit build respect?

Myth: We'll lose rushees.

Fact: Today's college woman is typically more mature and more focused on career, academic and personal development. She is likely balancing school, work and perhaps family responsibilities. For her, hazing is a relic, an activity and mentality whose time has passed. She is looking instead for meaningful experiences compatible with her goals and lifestyle. Chapters who eliminate hazing can expect an increase, not a decrease, in rushees, as well as a higher caliber of women.

Myth: We'll be made fun of-practically everyone hazes.

Fact: Chapters who abolish hazing found that their difference was a strong selling point, and membership flourished. Who can argue with a large group of strong, beautiful women?

Myth: It can't happen here.

Fact: It can! Statistics bear that out. Youth often have a sense of immortality, but that hasn't prevented the far too numerous tragedies caused by hazing.

Myth: We'll lose our traditions.

Fact: Tradition too often is the name given to the revered, hallowed, time-honored and staunchly defended way of doing things that can keep us from doing them better. There are plenty of positive traditions, which can be implemented or strengthened instead.

Myth: Our new members expect to be hazed.

Fact: Evidence shows that those who are hazed often haze in return. This is a vicious cycle, which must be broken.

Myth: We won't have unity in our new member classes.

Fact: What's more important is chapter unity. When hazed, new members will unify for protection, and bond in their dislike of the chapter members who abuse them. These classes become little more than autonomous, mini-sororities within the chapter. Chapters who stress new member class unity usually end up with numerous class cliques, all vying for their own agenda and influence, which destroys the dynamics of the whole chapter. Integrating new members fully into the chapter from the time of pledging builds and unifies the entire chapter.

Myth: We won't be able to motivate our new members.

Fact: If the only way you can motivate is by harassment, you need to change your leadership style.

Myth: Our alumnae will be upset.

Fact: Alumnae may initially be a problem, but most will come around when they see the results.

***Something to think about...***

