

**The Early Warning Signs of Hazing in College Fraternities and Sororities**

by

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## CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

### Overview

Hazing continues to dominate news headlines around college fraternities and sororities, so much so that students and administrators have called for abolishing these organizations that have roots in higher education extending over two hundred years (Banks & Archibald, 2020).

Proponents of Fraternity and Sorority Life point to leadership skills, communication skills, enhancement of the academic experience, retention rates, community volunteerism, the large network for jobs and careers, as well as alumni involvement after graduation (Zhang, 2016).

Critics often cite exclusionary practices by these organizations, including sexist behavior, and they may promote activities that are seen as demeaning, discriminatory, and even dangerous when it comes to hazing (Zhang, 2016).

Currently, thirteen percent of male students enrolled in host institutions full time are fraternity members, and the total value of fraternity houses nationwide totals at least three billion dollars according to Swofford. These nationally recognized fraternities provide tremendous financial savings to the host institutions in terms of student housing, which then expands the total number of students institutions can admit, and donations from Fraternity and Sorority alumni are higher than donations from non-Greek students (Swofford, 2020).

Hazing goes back centuries to Ancient Greece and Rome, where prospective soldiers were made to demonstrate their loyalty to their military by enduring painful experiences (Parks, 2015). It was even legalized, supported, and encouraged in England during the nineteenth century because they believed that hazing taught obedience (Bruckner, 2018).

Incidents of hazing occur across the entire spectrum of human culture, and it has been documented in Native American tribes, the military, university sports, and fraternities and sororities. In 1684, Joseph Webb was the first Harvard student to be punished for hazing (expulsion) when he was found responsible for physically assaulting first-year students and forcing them to perform acts of servitude. Webb ultimately repented for what he had done and was allowed to return to the university and graduate (Parks, 2015).

In 1873, New York had its first case of hazing at Cornell University which resulted in the death of Mortimer Leggett (Bruckner, 2018). Throughout the mid-1800s, hazing traditions were prevalent in the United States Armed Forces, but that led to Congress prohibiting all forms of military hazing with its first anti-hazing statute in 1874 (Bruckner, 2018). There is some evidence to suggest that host institutions not only tolerated hazing but encouraged fraternities to haze. According to Swofford (2020), the University of Illinois's dean of men declared in 1915 that fraternity hazing was a form of horse-play that determined what a man possesses, whether he has a streak of yellow or stamina. The Great Depression, World War I, and World War II created a lull in the growth of Greek Organizations, but the influx of World War II veterans into colleges and universities brought in a boot camp mentality including sleep deprivation and strenuous physical activity (Parks, 2015). The result of hazing activities can result in psychological/physical damage to an individual, even death. Hazing can result in lawsuits generating millions of dollars in compensatory and punitive damages for higher educational institutions as well as the sorority or fraternity (Tingley, 2018).

Terminology around new member processes is an important part of this discussion. Recruitment or intake in the Fraternity and Sorority community do not inherently demean or

dehumanize students seeking membership. However, the use of the term “pledging” is diminishing overtime given the connection to hazing and the notion of “pledges”, or people who are bullied as they seek fraternity or sorority membership, hence many national organizations have changed their terminology from “pledges” to “new members” or “associate members” in their national constitutions or bylaws. Some traditionally white fraternities, such as Lambda Chi Alpha, Sigma Phi Epsilon, and Beta Theta Pi, have worked to eliminate any form of new member period, while others including Phi Kappa Psi and Sigma Alpha Epsilon have shortened their new member period to a few days or a few weeks. Members of historically black fraternities and sororities in the National Pan-Hellenic Conference go through an intake process that consists of interest meetings, an application, and educational sessions before you are initiated as a full member. Interestingly enough, NPHC and MGC (Multicultural Greek Council) organizations often coordinate intake in clusters, where the purpose is to group a few chapters from the same region to have the same intake experience, also referred to as “lines”. Doing so takes the experience from being run locally to a more consistent intake process with the national organization, eliminating any chance of hazing (Tingley, 2018). In research interviews, students frequently used words and phrases like “initiation”, “bonding”, “tradition”, and “building group unity” as aliases for hazing (Véliz-Calderón, 2017).

In 1978, Chuck Stenzel died in a hazing accident involving alcohol at Alfred University, which led to the creation of the “Committee to Halt Useless College Killings” (CHUCK), which led to twelve states enacting hazing statutes during the 1980s (Bruckner, 2018). Also important to mention is the passage of the 1984 National Minimum Drinking Age Act which raised the legal drinking age to twenty-one, shifting college parties from bars to the fraternity houses (now the

primary source of alcohol to the underage), and the number of lawsuits began to sky-rocket (Parks, 2019). By 1990, twenty-five states had laws to regulate hazing, and by 2018 there were forty-four states with anti-hazing laws, all having varying fees and jail time for a hazing violation, as well as various definitions of hazing and what they cover (Bruckner, 2018). There is federal legislation that addresses hazing such as the END ALL Hazing Act and the Report and Educate About Campus Hazing (REACH) Act (Scudder, 2021).

Unfortunately, the problem starts well before these students arrive on these college campuses, in organizations well beyond fraternities and sororities. According to Allan, 1.5 million high school students are hazed each year, and 47% of students came to college already having experienced hazing. Fifty five percent of college students who are involved in clubs, teams, and organizations have experienced hazing, Forty percent of athletes who reported being involved in hazing behaviors reported that a coach or advisor was aware of the activities, and 22% report that the coach was involved. Two in five students say they are aware of hazing taking place on their campus, and more than 1 in 5 report they have witnessed hazing personally. The most common types of hazing practices across all types of student groups include alcohol consumption, humiliation, isolation, sleep-deprivation, and sexual acts. Eighty two percent of deaths from hazing involve alcohol (Allan, 2023).

Today, there are 750,000 undergraduate members on more than 800 college campuses in the United States and Canada, with 12,000 chapters and 123 fraternities and sororities (Scudder, 2021). There are at least 9 million living alumni in the United States (Pike, 2024).

## **Reflexivity Statement**

I have personally experienced physical hazing as an undergraduate student. While being initiated into my fraternity at the University at Buffalo in 1994, I was branded in the chest without my knowledge or consent, as I was blindfolded at the time. I remember specifically thinking that there had to be a better way to teach new members without physical or mental abuse. I felt betrayed. After initiation, I explained to the chapter that we would never haze any of our new members again. It was not in line with my values and I could not be associated with an organization that would do something like this to their new members. We agreed as a group that this practice was going to end.

As a professional working at our Fraternity headquarters from 2012 - 2015, I was usually the first person contacted by the host institution when hazing reports surfaced. I have worked in partnership with student affairs professionals on various occasions to remove hazing practices by replacing them with something that is not mental or physical abuse, by working with alumni and advisors to better understand what hazing is and why we need to remove it from our organization, and by conducting membership reviews to remove any students from the organization who are engaging in hazing activities.

In 2019, a new freshman member of my chapter named Sebastian Serafin-Bazan was performing calisthenics in the basement of the chapter house as reported by Nguyen (2023). Serafin-Bazan fell and hit his head on a coffee table, then he entered cardiac arrest on the lawn outside (Nguyen, 2023). Serafin-Bazan died in Buffalo General Medical Center on April 17, 2019, five days after the incident. My chapter was closed, and a settlement was reached with the

national fraternity, the local chapter, and three fraternity members to the Serafin-Bazan family in the amount of \$665,000 (Nguyen, 2023).

Today, as a regular speaker on hazing prevention during National Hazing Prevention Week, conventions, and various points throughout the year for fraternities, sororities, athletics, the band, and other student organizations. I teach the history of hazing in higher education, recent trends, hazing detection, replacement activities, peer intervention, peer-to-peer hazing prevention education, and outline the real partnership opportunities between the organizations and the administration at our host institutions. By engaging in this research, I hope to share the results with students on college campuses to eliminate confusion on what constitutes hazing in their chapter, and I hope to build best practices for student affairs professionals in detecting hazing activity before students are injured across various councils. I also hope we can share best practices for intervention so new student affairs professionals are better prepared when a hazing incident occurs on their campus.

### **Statement of Research Problem**

According to Hank Nuwer's Hazing Clearinghouse, there has been at least one hazing death every year since 1958 (Nuwer, n.d.). In 95% of cases where students identified their experience as hazing, they did not report it to campus officials, and 9 out of 10 students who experienced hazing behavior in college did not consider themselves to be hazed (Allan, 2023). Furthermore, 36% of students say they would not report hazing primarily because "there's no one to tell," and 27% feel that adults won't handle it right (Allan, 2023).

Today's college students struggle to identify acts of hazing because there is not a common, well-understood definition, which prevents the development of consistent reports of hazing incidents to assist with intervention efforts by college administrators as rumors of hazing can spread quickly on anonymous apps and websites. The term hazing has different meanings to students, college campuses, and even national fraternities or sororities, while multiple states, organizations, and research efforts have established their own definitions (Keller, 2015).

In a 2024 qualitative study done by members of the Piazza Center with 30 participants, researchers mentioned the struggle from practitioners with applying the "why" to understanding/detecting when hazing occurs, and they also noticed differences in strategies based on gender and race/ethnicity that needed to be explored further. The problem under investigation in this study is exploring how we can create consistency in hazing definitions for policy makers, practitioners in the field, and students, as well as identifying when/where to intervene across genders and race/ethnicity for new advisors that might not be as familiar with all the various councils on their campus. While many in higher education agree that hazing is prevalent on college campuses and can be dangerous, it still remains understudied in sociological literature. The lack of attention results in notable gaps in our understanding of hazing on college campuses today, and we don't fully understand how students rationalize, excuse, or justify its occurrence given the risk, fines, suspensions, expulsion, or even arrests associated with the activity (Alexander & Opsal, 2021).

### **Purpose of Study**

College students in today's fraternities and sororities do not fully understand where the line is between new member education and hazing (Keller, 2015), and the student affairs professionals who advise them do not have a common understanding of when and where they should intervene. At this stage in the research, hazing will be generally defined as mental or physical abuse of the new members. The purpose of this phenomenological study is to investigate the beliefs and attitudes of student affairs professionals who advise active fraternity and sorority members on college campuses. The study will focus on their understanding of hazing, as well as their identification of intervention strategies to enhance student safety.

Furthermore, the goal is to explore student affairs professionals' experiences with hazing on campus by using open-ended questions to uncover common themes in their experiences and perceptions (Creswell, 2018).

### **Research Questions**

Taking a constructivist worldview, we construct the meaning of hazing forged in discussions with student affairs professionals and will interpret what we find. The phenomenological design allows us to describe the lived experiences of student affairs professionals around hazing as described by these participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Student affairs professionals who advise Fraternities and Sororities will describe their understanding of hazing within higher education in interviews, as well as their experiences in detecting hazing in various councils across race, ethnicity, or sex. Finally, we want student affairs professionals to share the moment when they felt it was necessary to intervene. The research questions are as follows:

1. How do student affairs professionals describe their definition of hazing?
2. How is hazing prevention and intervention addressed through practices, priorities, and policies?

### **Framework**

Conceptual framework will help us explain how undergraduate experiences, professional experiences, and the signs of hazing come together to inform the phenomenon of hazing. Similarly, this conceptual framework will also help us organize prevention activities, interventions, and lessons learned by the student affairs professionals to reduce the frequency and severity of hazing.

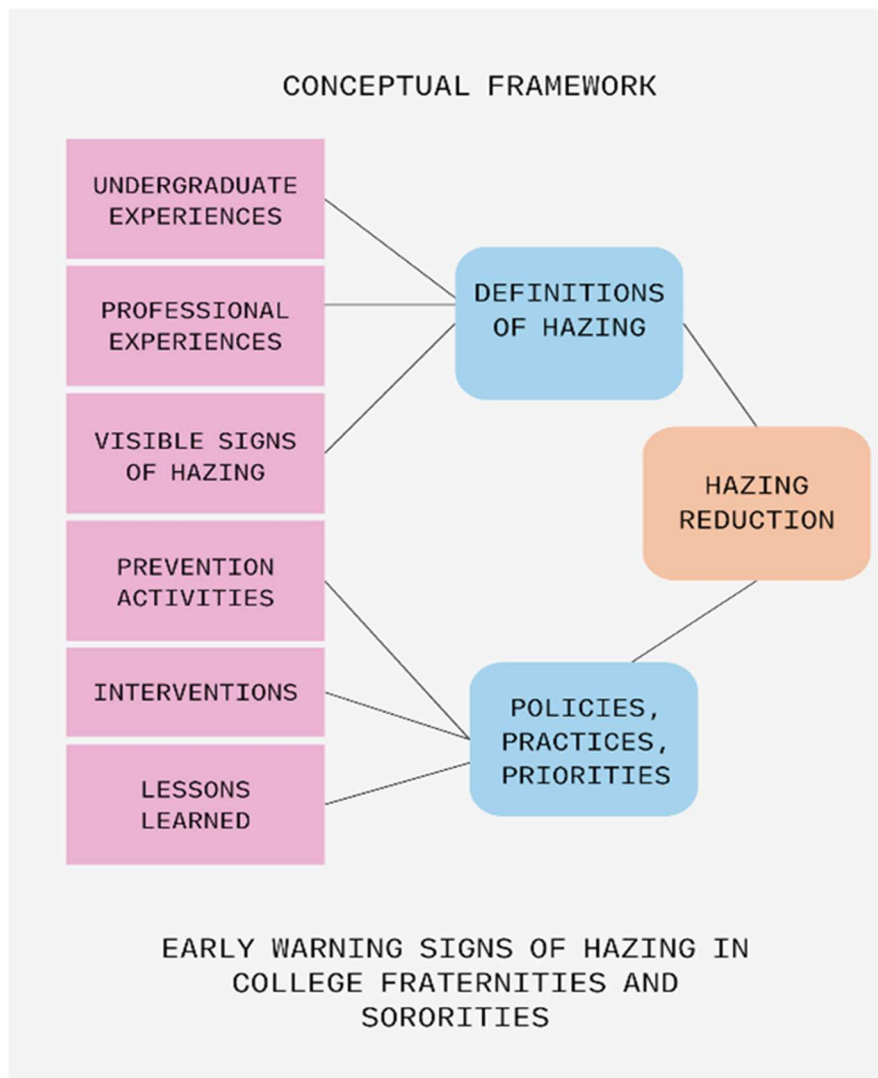


Figure 1, The Early Warning Signs of Hazing in College Fraternities and Sororities

### Limitations

Although this study offers new knowledge about student affairs professionals' perceptions and lived experiences in advising students on hazing, several limitations characterize the research. I made every effort to invite all 20 student affairs professionals to participate in the study, and only 9 volunteered. Those who chose to participate may differ from the other advisors in their cultural awareness, region of the country, type of institution, or

they may possess particular attitudes toward hazing behaviors based on their personal experiences. Therefore, interviews with these participants may not accurately reflect the experiences and perceptions of all student affairs professionals.

Second, we did not distinguish between advisors who work with large fraternity and sorority communities and small fraternity and sorority communities. Although we focused on professionals' experiences with hazing, their perceptions, knowledge, and experiences may differ between professionals based on the size of the institution and the frequency of hazing incidents that they see.

Third, we did not distinguish between advisors who work with public versus private institutions. Practices, priorities, and policies might differ based on whether they are public or private institutions, and future students could focus on these distinctive groups to uncover differences in professionals' experiences, thus provide valuable insight.

## **Summary**

While proponents of the Fraternity and Sorority community point to leadership skills, community service, retention rates, graduation rates, and a large network, critics of the Fraternity and Sorority community point to sexist behavior, discrimination, and injury or death when it comes to hazing behaviors. A long history of social fraternities within higher education that dates back to 1824 suggests that they are intimately tied to collegiate life. However, we continue to discuss the dangers of hazing with no significant progress made over the last century. This study will help us develop a common definition of hazing, share early warning

signs across various councils, and evaluate the proper intervention points to prevent students from getting injured or killed.

## CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Before we can prevent hazing on college campuses, it is necessary first to understand why hazing occurs in society across not only higher education, but also in other areas such as the military, the band, and athletics. This literature review discusses theories and frameworks that have driven identity development, institutional responsibilities of hazing prevention, motivational causes, power dynamics, ways we can prevent injury or death through bystander intervention/accountability, and findings at the intersection of race, sex, and alcohol.

### **History of Fraternities and Sororities**

Literary societies helped to fill a void in the educational process by providing an opportunity for students to develop their speaking and writing skills, as well as a spirit of intellectualism instead of recitation in class (Brown, 2012). Often the literary society would have a larger and better library than the college itself, using secret initiations, mottoes, and badges. The literary societies evolved into Greek-letter social organizations starting with Phi Beta Kappa, founded in 1776 at the College of William and Mary (Zhang, 2016). They sponsored essay writing, debates, and orations with discussion topics such as “the advantages of an established Church,” “the justice of African slavery,” and “whether anything is more dangerous to civil liberty in a free state than a standing army in time of peace.” This was also a vehicle for social activities with a secret handshake, motto, sign, and password to identify those who belonged with an initiation ritual in Greek and Latin to explain the organization’s secrets. Masonic influence is assumed because two of the founders of Phi Beta Kappa and eight subsequent members were Masons, including a Masonic characteristic of expansion in that the

mother chapter would grant a charter to individuals who wanted to establish a new chapter. This individual took the charter (a piece of paper with the fraternity's constitution on it), and tore it in half, while the mother chapter kept half of the charter, and the new chapter retained the other half. If the new chapter proved unworthy of the fraternity's ideals, the charter could be withdrawn. By 1780, Phi Beta Kappa had established chapters at twenty colleges (Brown, 2012).

Chi Phi started as a social fraternity at Princeton in 1824, originally called The Chi Phi Society according to their website. Fraternities started to gain popularity starting with the Union Triad: Kappa Alpha Society (1825), Sigma Phi (1827), and Delta Phi Society (1827), and then after the Civil War we saw the rise of women's Greek-letter social organizations known as sororities as well as an increase in professional societies in academic disciplines such as medicine, law, and engineering (Zhang, 2016). Kappa Alpha Society existed primarily to free members from the oppressive clutch of the fun-spoiling administration (Parks, 2019). Goals often included correcting the perceived wrongs of the college administration, providing activities for students, obtaining more rights for the students, and a brotherhood/sisterhood for friendship according to Brown (2012).

Before the Civil War, literary societies were prevalent at higher education institutions (Banks & Archibald, 2020). In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, colleges in the United States experienced a wave of collective student uprising (Zhang, 2016). Information presented in class was not to be criticized or analyzed, but rather memorized or translated and then recited in Greek or Latin which did not allow students to expand their thinking and was often considered tiresome and dull. Eating, sleeping, studying, and socializing were all

supervised with little freedom to diverge from the routine described as “pay, pray, study, and accept.” Colonial colleges copied the English system of dividing the student body into freshman, sophomore, junior, and senior classes where class designation was the first form of student association. Each class had its own rituals, customs, insignia, and clothes for important social activities which strengthened bonding for each class and made interclass rivalry a significant part of college life. By 1725, members of each class at Harvard were ranked according to their fathers’ social position (Brown, 2012). Discipline from college presidents and faculty conflicted with the ambitious young men who had come from wealth, and that conflict would later go underground into a fraternity and sorority system where they could express themselves covertly (Zhang, 2016).

Churches and religion had a big impact on higher education. “The churches sponsored higher education before there were any state-sponsored colleges or universities; indeed, before there were states”, as described by Burtchaell (1991). Harvard was chartered in 1636 by its Puritan founders, which was created to mirror Emmanuel College, Cambridge University for the purpose of “inculcating specific patterns of religious belief and social conduct”, according to Burtchaell (1991). Later, members of other religious sects such as Anglicans, Calvinists, and Dutch Reforms established institutions to promote their set of Christian values and prepare literate, college-educated clergy (Burtchaell, 1991). Faculty viewed college as a place to impart knowledge, but also to develop strong religious and moral character with a routine of daily prayer, religious study, and Sunday church (Brown, 2012). Debate followed on whether classical curriculum was best or if higher education should be open to intellectually capable students, and by 1894, a negative perception of church influence in higher education ultimately

led to fifteen seats on the Board of Overseers at Harvard that were filled by clergy had now been reduced to one (Burtchaell, 1991). At Yale, by 1920, there were only four clergy left among the eleven on the board, and Vanderbilt's first lay chancellor (James Kirkland) drew his board away from the bishops in 1910 (Burtchaell, 1991).

Students were now clearly moving away from the campus' narrow classical curriculum and the over-emphasis on discipline led to the establishment of debate clubs, literary societies, and eventually the Greek-letter social fraternity movement (Zhang, 2016). He also mentions that it brought young men together into small community groups that filled the vacuum left by removal from the family/home, as well as an escape from the monotony of the college regimen and the lack of privacy in the dorms.

According to Zhang (2016), it provided social outlets away from the oversight of college officials, challenged campus rules, and provided housing that became very appealing. It expanded from there. Some national organizations debated whether women should be admitted as members, and some attempts were made to give women some sort of peripheral status. Women objected to that and instated on full membership, but when this was not obtained, they created their own organizations (Brown, 2012). In 1851, Alpha Delta Pi was founded and is considered the oldest secret society for college women worldwide according to their website. By 1870, Kappa Alpha Theta was founded at DePauw University as the first women's Greek-letter fraternity (or commonly referred to as "sorority"), and soon thereafter came Kappa Kappa Gamma, Alpha Phi, Delta Gamma, Gamma Phi Beta, and Sigma Kappa on different campuses (Zhang, 2016). According to Allen (2024), historically white sororities used

heterosocial interactions to achieve their ideal model of conventional, white, middle- to upper-class womanhood.

Minorities increasingly were entering college campuses, and there were clauses enacted by fraternities and sororities prohibiting their membership, as well as clauses that prohibited Jewish membership (Zhang, 2016). Allan (2024) links race and racism with historically white fraternities by detailing Hechinger's examination of the Aryan race requirement and the exclusion of full-blooded Jews written into the governing laws of a particular fraternity until the 1950s when the revision took place as a "public relations move, a shift from explicit to unspoken discrimination." Allan (2024) explains that fraternities have always been exclusive by rejecting the arrival of women and people of color on their campuses, and by dominating aspects of student life including athletics, student government, and engaging in hazing as a means of demonstrating manliness. This would eventually lead minority students on college campuses to start their own organizations in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

This was an especially abusive and oppressive time for African Americans, as the Supreme Court ruled in 1896 that separate facilities for blacks and whites were constitutional. This was a period of racial inequality and social disadvantage for African Americans, and it was clearly seen on college campuses, such as Cornell, where students were isolated and segregated from the general student population. He demonstrates that fact by highlighting the six African American students from the 1904-05 class at Cornell that failed to re-enroll for the 1905-06 year. A group of students (including the founders of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Incorporated) decided to create a study and support group for the remaining African American students at Cornell as they had nowhere to turn except inward for solutions. These seven

Cornell students became the founders of the first African American college fraternity in the United States who would adopt ideas of fighting injustice in American society from one of their earliest members, W. E. B. DuBois. DuBois would later help found the NAACP in 1909. They quickly expanded to Howard University (the preeminent African American university in the country). Since its inception, Alpha Phi Alpha has chartered 414 college chapters and 369 alumni chapters with a focus on mentoring, world and national affairs, education, and continuing the legacy (Ross, 2019). He later describes the founding of the other African American fraternities including Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity Inc., Omega Psi Phi Fraternity Inc., Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity Inc., and Iota Phi Theta Fraternity Inc.

Ethel Hedgeman Lyle, a junior at Howard University, returned from the summer of 1907 and was inspired the idea of creating an African American sorority. Nine young women came together to create Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority in January 1908. He describes a rift that started in 1912 between undergraduates who wanted to change the name, motto, color, and symbols of the sorority and the loyal graduate members, and the dissident undergraduates left the organization to create Delta Sigma Theta Sorority. Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Inc. and Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority, Inc. would later be created and form the Divine Nine with the African American fraternities (Ross, 2019).

In 1891, Kappa Kappa Gamma called for a conference among seven women's sororities, and then nine years later, the first interfraternal association called the Inter-Sorority Conference (later to be known as the National Panhellenic Conference or NPC) was formed. The North-American Interfraternity Conference (NIC) started as the umbrella organization for fraternities in 1910, and then the National Pan-Hellenic Council was established as the umbrella

organization for historically black fraternities and sororities (also known as the “Divine Nine” or NPHC) at Howard University in May of 1930. Finally, the National Association of Latino Fraternal Organizations (NALFO), the National Multicultural Greek Council (NMGC), and the National Asian Pacific Islander American Panhellenic Association (NAPA) were established in 1997, all of which formed as a response for collaboration and resources (Banks & Archibald, 2020).

### **Who is Hazed, Who Hazes, and Why?**

According to Allan (2020), a multi-institutional study of college students in a range of clubs, organizations, and teams revealed that 32.4% of male students and 22% of female students experienced behaviors that met the definition of hazing, which we will define in the following sections. That same study showed that male students showed a greater likelihood to haze others, have experienced hazing in high school, and indicated that alumni were present during the hazing activities. A national study of college student hazing showed that 61% of male respondents and 52% of female respondents experienced behaviors meeting the definition of hazing (Allan, 2020). It is seen across a range of groups including athletic teams, Greek-letter groups, club sports, intramurals, performing arts groups, service organizations, recreation clubs, academic clubs, honor societies, military groups, religious or church-based groups, student government, and culturally-based student organizations (Allan, 2008). Marchell (2024) discussed the highest prevalence of hazing was found among members of varsity athletics (74%), fraternities and sororities (73%), club sport teams (64%), performing art groups (56%), service fraternities/sororities (50%), intramural teams (49%), academic clubs (28%), and honor societies (20%). Interestingly, more students reported positive outcomes from hazing (such as feeling closer to the group) than identified negative outcomes (Marchell, 2024).

Typically, hazers are the leaders of the group, are often senior members, and they usually have high standing in the group because of their size, status, abilities, or personality. Most likely, the hazers were once victims of hazing themselves, and now they believe it's their turn to repeat this activity with the newcomers who have low social status in the group. Hazing can take place on campus or off campus, and students have reported that friends, coaches, family, and advisors have some knowledge of the hazing activities (Bruckner, 2018).

There are some notable differences across races. The common rationales for hazing in white fraternities and sororities are increase in group cohesiveness, fulfillment of psychological and sociological needs of rites of passage, fostering of group solidarity, and preservation of tradition. Hazing scholar Stephen Sweet believes that hazing is linked with students' need for belonging, isolation from other social activities on campus, and beliefs that hazing is a necessary component of fraternity initiation rites. Sweet also uses the Looking Glass theory that pledges perceive their self-concept through social reflections (the feedback the fraternity gives him). Severity-Attraction Hypothesis states that the more effort a person puts into reaching their goal, the more they will rationalize the goal of being worthy of all the effort (Parks, 2015).

Some researchers believe that hazing in black male (NPHC) organizations included more instances of violence and physical hardships than in predominantly white fraternal organizations, and hazing in white male (NIC) organizations are more likely to involve abuse of alcohol. Given the strong desire to fit into the group, potential new members are likely more susceptible to the influence of their peers' high-risk alcohol norms that are well beyond their limit (Allan, 2020).

The role of the chapter facility is important here as well. The fraternity and sorority house is similar to a locker room among athletes in that it is free from the watchful eye of coaches and where teammates protect each other from negative consequences (Allan, 2020). This can be problematic in that most fraternity and sorority members are drinkers, and more than 86% of fraternity house residents were binge drinkers (Allan, 2020).

Despite the popular reason for group solidarity in terms of why hazing occurs, Cimino's (2022) study shows results consistent with the possibility that hazing experiences are not substantially related to feelings of solidarity. Cimino (2022) found that induction fun was positively and significantly associated with active and chapter-focused solidarity. Another study with student athlete hazing found that the more hazing student athletes report witnessing or experiencing, the less cohesive they perceived their team to be in sport-related tasks. Yet another finding was that group initiations with a high level of severity such as embarrassment or harassment led to negative emotions such as loneliness, frustration, depression, and members feeling less bonded to their group (Alexander & Opsal, 2021).

Sykes and Matza's neutralization theory (1957) listed five techniques that people use to neutralize their delinquent behavior, including denial of responsibility, denial (or downplaying) the victim's injury, denial of the victim (flipping the responsibility of harm onto the victim as retaliation or punishment), condemnation of the condemners focuses on the motives or behaviors of those who disapprove of their actions, and the appeal to higher loyalties when the offense was necessary for the greater good of the organization or to achieve the goal of campus prestige). All of these techniques of neutralization are excuses or justifications that enable this deviance to occur (Alexander & Opsal, 2021).

In one study, a senior member of a fraternity and manager of a Varsity athletic team said, “if someone is willing to prove their loyalty to an organization by doing certain things or doing certain tasks, if you want to do it and you feel that strongly about it this is America and you should have that right. It should be my choice”. So, in this scenario, the ethos of American individualism justifies hazing because we should have the right to choose to be hazed even if harm or liability is a potential outcome of the activity (Alexander & Opsal, 2021).

### **What is Hazing and What are Hazing Activities?**

By looking at various hazing definitions, we can understand what frames students and administrators naturally use to define hazing, where gaps (and potentially interventions) may lie in these definitions, and where differences between these two sub-populations and institutions may present themselves (Feuer, 2019). Scholars and legislatures have struggled to define hazing (Parks, 2015). We can find various definitions of hazing across laws in each state, each campus in their student code of conduct, and each set of bylaws for today’s fraternities and sororities, which can lead to confusion. Parks (2015) even refers to the definition as amorphous in nature and so broad and indefinite that it can consist of assault and battery and a host of other criminal offenses, ranging anywhere from the wearing of a ‘beanie cap’ to the permanent disfigurement of the body. Cimino (2011) defined it as generating induction costs (experiences necessary to be acknowledged as a legitimate group member) that appear unattributable to group-relevant assessments, preparations, or chance. Cimino (2011) goes on to suggest that a high-cost induction will presumably discourage those who desire only short-term association (and short-term benefits), which suggests an evolutionary theory of hazing to reduce newcomers’ ability to free ride. Cimino (2022) adjusts this definition slightly over time

by defining a strict definition that it is non-accidental, costly aspects of group induction activities that do not appear to be group-relevant assessments/preparation or appear excessive in their application required to obtain membership for new or prospective members. Cimino's (2022) definition helps in examples such as requiring calisthenics as a group-relevant assessment or preparation in athletic teams (whereas in fraternities this is not group-relevant).

Johnson (2017) defines hazing as described by the National Collaborative for Hazing Research and Prevention as "any activity expected of someone joining a group that humiliates, degrades, abuses, or endangers them regardless of the person's willingness to participate." The idea here is to break down potential new members by removing their existing identities and rebuild them with a new social identity according to Johnson (2017). He even explains that hazing continues to thrive today because new members become trapped in the cycle of hazing, in that newly initiated members haze the new pledge class like they were hazed, creating a vicious cycle of abuse that is hard to break. After initiation, members feel they have the right to do to others what has been done to them, or for the pledges to earn their respect. The pledges may not feel he or she has the choice to leave once they are invested, and the bonds are similar to those shared with biological family members (Johnson, 2017).

There are different levels to hazing activities. Bruckner (2018) describes these levels as subtle hazing and harassment hazing, and he defines subtle hazing as going against the sorority or fraternity standards of conduct that ridicules, humiliates, or embarrasses the newcomer. He defines harassment hazing as mental or physical discomfort or activities that cause undue stress to the newcomer. Examples include excessive alcohol consumption, humiliation, isolation, or sleep deprivation just to fit in with the group. The psychological and emotional

harm can include anger, fear, nightmares, poor academic performance, difficulty eating, difficulty concentrating, and even suicidal tendencies (Bruckner, 2018).

Schiffer (2022) discusses Cimino's four core characteristics of hazing, which state that it is coalitional, unidirectional, temporary, and coercive. Interestingly, if the hazing was humiliating or physical and posted on social media, that predicted longer hazing endurance and suggests one's social reputation and increased possibility of others seeing hazing progress may motivate longer hazing endurance (Schiffer, 2022).

Allan (2019) notes that there are documented gender differences in hazing. While some occur for both men and women (drinking games, singing or chanting), some behaviors can be more often seen for one gender such as association with specific people and not others (ranking third for women and fifth for men). Physically taxing experiences, having to drink large amounts of alcohol to the point of getting sick or passing out, and enduring harsh weather conditions without appropriate clothing are seen more often for men than women (Allan, 2019). According to Véliz-Calderón (2017), hazing practices were more likely to be associated with humiliation and loss of power for men, while female students it was more common for bodies to be the focus of scrutiny (bodies are objectified in hazing resulting in emotional harm). Allan (2024) describes one female student who had to sit on a washing machine to see how much fat was jiggling. She also describes hazing in private spaces that include personal servitude, running errands, driving individuals around, house cleanings, apartment cleanings, sending weather reports in the morning, sending a joke of the day, or displaying manhood such as "family alcohol" where new members feel pressure to consume alcohol because they perceive that their fraternity brothers (or family members in this case) also drink. The family

within a fraternity is derived from a member who has multiple decedents of little brothers or little sisters in the same organization. The definition of hazing used for this study is the voluntary or involuntary mental or physical abuse of the new members.

### **Why Do Students Haze?**

Many different societies have used rites of passage to mark physiological transitions, such as birth, puberty, conception, and death, where participants are passing between two social groups marked by the performance of a socially determined ritual. He adds that rites of passage reflect the social structures by which society is organized and into which participants must fit. The three-part structure of rites of passage include separation, margin, and aggregation. Separation is the severing ties from the old group, margin is where they symbolically and ritually have nothing, and aggregation is where they are invited to join the new group in which they enter at the lowest rung. He mentions that it reinforces in their minds a hierarchy and structure that is supported by the new group, so it is creating and justifying power relationships between participants in the ritual. One sees similarities within the collegiate fraternity and sorority context, as they are separated from family/friends, hazed to reinforce powerlessness, and then elevated to inclusion in the organization – and then the cycle repeats to a new officiant (Parks, 2015). Students will often appeal to higher loyalties, where they place importance on purpose, discipline, tradition, and maintaining the group's status within a campus hierarchy (Alexander & Opsal, 2021).

Allan (2020) believes that the reasons for hazing can be organized into six primary functions including a rite of passage, alignment of individual and group identity, exerting power

and dominance, discouraging freeloaders, group cohesion, and moral disengagement. Bandura (1999) points out that moral disengagement (viewing themselves as moral agents while inflicting harm on others) may focus on cognitive restructuring of inhumane conduct into a worthy one by moral justification, sanitizing language (hazing versus new member education), advantageous comparison (hazing is not as bad as it once was on this campus), displacement/diffusion of responsibility (the chapter decided on this activity), minimizing the effects of one's actions (nobody was physically injured), dehumanization (nicknames), and attribution of blame (new members needed discipline). Bruckner (2018) believes that hazing brings a sense of belonging, and these students would rather go through humiliation or pain for initiation into a group rather than not fit in. Also, senior members enforce a hierarchy where newcomers have less power than those who are already accepted as members. Students believe that going through this process will bring the group closer because they all share the same experience (Bruckner, 2018).

Schiffer (2022) discusses Cimino's theories (2011) on why hazing occurs as basic commitment and dominance theories as well as automatic accrual theory. In Cimino's basic commitment theory, it maintains hazing is designed to increase group solidarity and group valuation from newcomers, while newcomers' continued participation shows their commitment to the group. In Cimino's basic dominance theory, hazing allows current group members to demonstrate power over newcomers to establish hierarchical control. Finally, in automatic accrual theory, hazing is a way to ensure group benefits are not granted to undeserving newcomers. Schiffer introduces a concept called masculine honor beliefs (MHB) where aggression or violence is necessary and justifiable in response to provocation or in the

protection of oneself. So, individuals with higher MHB may view hazing as an opportunity to demonstrate manhood, maintain their honor, value social reputation, and engage in risk-taking behaviors (Schiffer, 2022).

The self-justification theory of cognitive dissonance says that university students may view themselves as smart people, and as such may be reluctant to admit that despite being smart, they joined a group that degraded them through hazing activities. To justify their original decision to join, they may want to demonstrate the correctness of the decision by hazing the next members. This makes them feel positive about the group that subjected them to hazing and feel like they are helping the new members bond through the hazing experience (Johnson, 2017).

Johnson (2017) also felt that hazing may grow worse as a result of the government and schools attempting to use disciplinary measures to end hazing that would be attributed to Reactance Theory, which is when individuals perceive their ability to perform free behaviors is threatened, the attractiveness of the threatened behavior increases. In essence, they would be reestablishing dominion over their own freedom, and show their authority/control over the Greek system (Johnson, 2017).

A 2008 study showed that 31% of students who experienced hazing said they felt more like a part of the group, and 22% said they felt a sense of accomplishment as a result of the hazing (Allan, 2020). A 2019 study showed students reported positive associations with hazing such as feeling more like a part of the group (62.8%), feeling a sense of accomplishment (54%), and feeling stronger (35.7%) according to Allan (2019). Some respondents reported negative

outcomes such as feeling stressed (26.4%), having trouble with academics (12.6%), feeling humiliated (9%), having difficulty sleeping (8.7%), having difficulty concentrating in class (8.5%), and feeling depressed (7.4%) according to Allan (2019).

### **What are the Different Types of Hazing?**

In white fraternities, hazing can be divided into two types: physical hazing (paddling, runs, calisthenics, forced alcohol consumption) and psychological hazing (sleep deprivation, yelling at new members, blind-folding). Hazing in white fraternities can be observed in terms of masculinity, as new members attempt to drink the most to impress other men and be considered the most masculine. An interesting reflection of the growing negative stigma of homosexuality combined with the growing number of women on college campuses could be the reason why new members feel the need to brag and boast about sexual exploitations to display masculinity in a group setting (Parks, 2015). McCready (2022) suggests that hazing practices in men's organizations are often used to reinforce misogyny and homophobia because the intimate relationships valued by fraternity members are perceived as feminine, and hazing challenges any ridicule to their status as men. He further explains that collective masculine norm climates of risk-taking, heterosexual presentation, power over women, and sexual promiscuity had positive relationships with endorsement of social dominance hazing and these climates vary between fraternity chapters. McCready (2023) later found decreases in heterosexual presentation and power over women from their first to their last year of fraternity membership, perhaps due to fraternities challenging members' attitudes related to misogyny and homophobia over time.

Students who identified as Asian, Native Hawaiian, or Pacific Islander endorsed social dominance hazing more than their peers because Asian American men are often feminized, and the hazing establishes their identities as real fraternity men that have valued aspects of masculinity such as social dominance, obedience, and violence (McCready, 2020). Within white sororities, hazing falls into similar physical and psychological categories including high-risk drinking or forced participation in humiliating acts that degrade women in front of men (Parks, 2015).

Parks (2015) describes hazing seen in black sororities as the use of emotional, mental, and physical discomfort as a means of teaching prospective members about the sorority history and background of the current members. There is an authorized Membership Intake Process here (MIP), and hazing is any activity outside the MIP. The National Pan-Hellenic Council's (NPHC) ban on pledging in black sororities created a secretive, underground nature to the hazing that occurs. The frequency and severity have increased since the ban, and women who choose to go through the MIP (a new, non-hazing process) retain a lower status among their own sorority members as opposed to those who are hazed and are called derogatory terms like paper, skater, and slider. He contends that hazing in black sororities is less common and less severe than hazing in black fraternities and is more emotional and psychological in nature than physical. Hazing in black sororities also involves the manipulation of the appearance of the prospective members so they conform to a uniform image, including wearing the same clothing, inconspicuous hairstyles, and not wearing makeup. Participants have been pinched, pushed, punched, kicked, paddled, and stomped by their line sisters or members of the sorority. According to Parks (2015), it is justified because it will correct unwanted behavior,

maintain order, weed out the good from the bad, create bonds between old members and new members, and allows prospective members to gain respect.

In Black Greek-Letter Fraternities (BGLF), researchers believe that physical hazing is much worse than among white Greek Fraternities. Men who became members of BGLF after the 1990 NPHC ban reported much more dangerous and life-threatening incidents, and now they engage in hazing as retaliation for the hazing that they endured. Members argue that it separates those that are truly interested in furthering the organization's goals, it separates masculine men from feminine men, and identifies those who will endure the pain to become a member. It is a symbolic remaking of self for the prospective member, making them more confident, and it turns them into stronger men. Hazing secures respect, credibility, and status for the individuals who participate in these activities (Parks, 2015).

### **How is Gender Identity Related to Hazing?**

Gender Theory explains that people make assumptions about gender identity based on the perception of social cues and behaviors associated with what it means to be a woman or man in a given society, and these mental constructs are often referred to as gender schemas. The schema of masculinity constructs the real man as someone who takes independent action, is a logical thinker, is in control, and appears physically strong. On the other side, young girls learn that being too strong may be interpreted as non-feminine, and therefore unattractive. College students are likely using these gender schemas as they try to make sense of hazing activity. In one study, male students frequently referenced physical strength and physical harm in their definitions of hazing (such as alcohol abuse), while female students focused more on

the physical effects of sleep deprivation or food-related hazing. Female students were more likely to describe friendship outside of hazing activity, although some bonds were an outcome of sharing the secret of doing something wrong through hazing activities, while they described the opportunities for opting out. Male students reported a social stigma and unspoken agreement where the refusal to participate in the hazing resulting in loss of membership opportunities, and opting out is likely to be considered feminine, passive, and weak. Importantly, students who acquire a good understanding of gender schemas may be more likely to recognize a broad range of hazing activities that include both emotional and physical harm (Véliz-Calderón, 2017).

### **Why Is It So Hard to Combat Hazing?**

First year students are in a unique transitional period where they are establishing, testing, and refining their new psychological identity. New friends may be a positive influence; however, an identity crisis may occur with transitional problems, and engaging in risky behavior might be a consequence. Students can feel increased pressure to confirm and fit into established peer expectations and groups, while exposing and encouraging them to accept hazing behaviors (Malaret, 2021).

A majority of students who experienced hazing did not report it, and half of the students said this was because they did not want their group or team to get in trouble. Others believe it was their choice to participate so they did not report it, and others don't even realize they were hazed until later in time (Bruckner, 2018). This suggests that there are underlying mechanisms that students use to neutralize or rationalize their experiences with hazing (Alexander & Opsal,

2021). When the university does not hold the hazer responsible, the hazing is reinforced because it is as if the university is condoning the hazing behaviors (Bruckner, 2018). In addition, some anti-hazing institutional policies and state laws are broad, have unclear definitions, and leave loopholes for what hazing is and the what penalties are for participating (Banks & Archibald, 2020). A study by Allan (2008) showed that students did not report the hazing activities because they did not want to get their group in trouble (37%), were afraid of negative consequences as individuals (20%), were afraid other members of the group would find out I reported it (14%), didn't know where to report it (9%), and they might be hurt by group members if they learned I had reported it (8%).

A study by Allan (2019) said few students who recognized they were hazed reported it to organization presidents (8.3%), university/college staff or faculty (5.8%), organizational advisors (3.9%), anonymously through hotlines (3.9%), national organization (3.4%), or anonymously through websites (2.9%). When they were asked why they didn't report, common responses included "I chose to participate" (75.9%), "it was no big deal" (64.4%), "it was tradition" (58.6%), and "no one got hurt" (50.8%) according to the same study (Allan, 2019). To make it even more complicated, almost 70% of students in Allan and Madden's 2012 research reported that they were aware of hazing in organizations other than their own, which suggests a culture on college campuses in which hazing is seen as normal or expected (Alexander & Opsal, 2021).

McCreary (2019) discussed severe initiation rituals designed to create cognitive dissonance in the mind of the initiate that could be resolved by convincing oneself that it was not very unpleasant, or exaggerate the positive characteristics of the group and minimize any

negative aspects (this happened with regularity). Further, McCreary (2019) revealed connections between human emotion, ritualistic symbols, and group solidarity in that rituals such as hazing were instrumental in binding individuals to the collective by requiring new members to work together to accomplish tasks and instilling a sense of accomplishment.

### **Moral and Psychosocial Development in College Fraternity and Sorority Chapters**

There are reasons why Fraternities and Sororities have been so successful on college campuses. A qualitative study by Mathiasen (2001) points to an emphasis on fairness, human rights, and social cooperation for a fraternity at a large Midwestern university with four major themes: recruiting quality students, upholding house traditions/reputation, emphasizing moral development, and encouraging community service. The various studies cited by Mathiasen suggested that neither Greek affiliation nor the university environment may be having an effect on the moral development of students, possibly because of a regression toward a group mean that masks the impact on particular individuals. Recommendations were to take a more aggressive role in developing educational programs that emphasize moral development (Mathiasen, 2001). Other research points to considerable psychological benefits to fraternity membership including an increase in the amount of time spent volunteering and being involved in the community, as well as a better sense of purpose and gain from strengthening their leadership skills. A large study on fraternity/sorority membership by Debard and Sacks showed that affiliated members had more credit hours as well as higher GPAs than non-affiliated students during their first year of college according to Grace (2023). Pike (2020) found modest but positive association in affiliated members for active learning and interactions with faculty. Other research found that fraternity men scored higher on various psychosocial and mental

health/wellness scales than non-members across all years of college. Members within fraternities and sororities reported higher personal and social skills, communication skills, critical thinking skills, collaborative work, and commitment with long-term implications for students beyond college. Furthermore, fraternity leadership conferences were found to strengthen participants' abilities that are grounded in values and ritual, which are connected to moral development in undergraduate students (Grace, 2023).

The challenges students in Fraternities and Sororities will face revolve around the moral and ethical judgements that these students will be making on a regular basis. What role will hazing play in their organization, if any? What is the risk, benefit, and purpose of hazing in the organization? Pressure will continue to build as students increase their responsibilities/activities in the organization, while still maintaining good grades in their classes. What is the student's responsibility when it comes to alcohol or drug abuse in the chapter? What is the student's responsibility when it comes to access to alcohol for those who are underage? All of these are moral and ethical judgements that the students will be wrestling with at various points in their career. The hope is that they will make good choices. The hope is that their commitment to the fraternity/sorority will strengthen the values already taught to them by their parents, teachers, and religious leaders (Ayalon, 2021).

Chickering (1969) described the importance of the institutional setting and the impact the environment has on student success, including institutional objectives, size, student-faculty relationships, curriculum, teaching, friendships, and student development programs (Killam, 2017). When we look at Chickering's Theory and the Seven Vectors of Development as described by Killam (2017), we can see why fraternity and sorority membership has remained

relevant for over a century within higher education because it heightens Chickering's framework:

- Students will develop competence across intellectual, physical, and interpersonal domains. They will gain new knowledge by running a small business while on a college campus, they will be exposed to new activities such as community service projects, and in that process, they will be regularly communicating and managing a diverse group students.
- Students will learn to manage their emotions as they form many new friendships and learn how to express themselves within the organization.
- Students will begin to move through autonomy toward interdependence as they develop problem-solving skills in the organization and begin to rely on each other within the fraternity or sorority.
- Students will develop mature interpersonal relationships in the organization as they accept those around them for who they are.
- Students will build a strong sense of identity in terms of their appearance, gender, sexual orientation, sense of self, roles, feedback from others, self-esteem, and stability.
- Students will have a strong sense of purpose in terms of their career and life goals through their academic work and roles within the organization.
- Students will develop integrity in their words, beliefs, values, and actions that are in line with the organization's mission (Killam, 2017).

Mathiasen (2001) noted Chickering's vector of *developing integrity*, and how colleges force one to shift from rules and norms to a more personal, relative view. Further, if the student's behavior is incongruent with their values/beliefs, an uncomfortable state of being occurs that forces the students to make an adjustment in these values/beliefs or change their behavior. It is here, especially in Fraternity and Sorority Life, where these values and beliefs will be tested in various scenarios. Mathiasen (2001) reinforces Chickering's perspectives on the force of friendships and student culture being amplified as the frequency and intensity of contacts increase, which is happening often within these organizational settings.

Pike's (2020) findings that Greek affiliation was negatively related to the integration of diverse college experiences was troubling, especially in light of Chickering's importance placed on integration in students' cognitive development. Pike believed that too great an emphasis on social involvement contributed to the negative effect of Greek affiliation on integration, as lower emphasis was placed on academic involvement and the integration of diverse curricular and co-curricular experiences. Clearly it depends on the institutional culture in which the fraternities and sororities exist (Pike, 2000). Rather than abolishing the Greek system or limiting its role on campus, he suggested a more intentional integration of Greek life into the academic life of the institution.

Erikson (1963) created an eight-stage model in which relationships with others and oneself serve as the central focus, as well as a clear and progressive path for emotional and social development. When we are discussing college students, this is typically the time they are heading toward adulthood as they seek to manage the conflict of *Identity Versus Identity Confusion*. The goal here is individuation and creating their own identity distinct from the

family. Students can struggle with identity issues, a lack of focus because of internal struggles, and trouble finding a social group. This is where college fraternities and sororities can provide the structure and identity for students that reflect the ideals of the organization in the form of brotherhood or sisterhood (Killam, 2017).

Maree (2021) talks about Identity vs. Role Confusion and describes that humans need to be given the opportunity to experience success in increasingly complex tasks. Fraternity and Sorority allows for this to happen, typically with smaller responsibilities initially as a new member, and then increasing in responsibilities over time as they approach senior year. Erikson felt that some people's inability to choose appropriate careers undermines their ability to navigate career-related transitions successfully (Maree, 2021).

In studies based on Erikson's theoretical notions, Adamczyk (2022) looked at three major criteria to determine the resolution of the intimacy crisis that includes the presence or absence of close relationships with peers, the presence or absence of a lasting relationship with a sexual partner, and the depth versus superficiality in the relationship. These criteria highlight the importance of high quality relationships (Adamczyk, 2022). The brotherhood and sisterhood bonds that are created within today's fraternities and sororities are high quality relationships where members can have tough conversations about personal issues such as relationships, family, and mental health struggles, and that can explain how 80% of fraternity men report excellent to good mental health and well-being according to the Benefits of Single-Sex Fraternity Involvement Study at UT Knoxville that was conducted through the North American Interfraternity Conference (NIC).

## Group Theory

It is very clear through Kolb's Theory of Experiential Learning (1984) that for student development and student learning to occur, we have to acknowledge that students learn differently from one another, and they should be engaged in a variety of methods (not just passive events) to meet their specific learning style (Killam, 2017). In addition, other theorists such as M.S. Corey and Corey (2010) help us understand group theory and the power of groups for intra- and interpersonal development, group norms, trust, respectful conflict, feedback, leader interventions, as well as interpersonal communications (Killam, 2017). If students don't have experiential learning opportunities or student groups to develop these critical skills while in college, they won't be as attractive to potential employers that are looking for these types of experiences prior to joining the workforce (Tupponce, 2024).

The connections with Schlossberg's Transition Theory (1981) are numerous. As described by Killam (2017), Transition Theory provides a framework for assisting students through their transitions of moving in (assessment and planning), moving through (achieving and learning), and moving out (graduation and jobs). The Fraternity and Sorority community (and the university) provides support to students in all phases. As students are moving into their dorms for their freshman year, you'll typically find Fraternity and Sorority members who are helping them move furniture into their dorms and start building relationships with these students to make them feel more comfortable on their first day. Fraternity and Sorority members will typically have recruitment events during the first two weeks of school to help welcome these students to campus and provide fun activities to help with the transition, which can be a lonely time for new students as they build relationships. In the moving through phase,

Fraternity and Sorority provides mentorship in the form of big brothers/sisters as well as alumni to help guide these students through class selection, time management, and maintaining good grades with formal study hours. Finally, during the moving out phase, the fraternity and sorority is there with a network of thousands of alumni to help them get the job/internship/career that the students are looking for in their designated field, as well as mock interviews and resume building time with affiliated professionals (Killam, 2017).

### **Student Engagement, Learning, College Satisfaction, and Mental Health**

There are many benefits of membership in fraternities and sororities that are aligned with the goals of higher education, including significant, positive direct relationships with student engagement, strong positive indirect relationships with self-reports of learning and acting through student engagement. At a time when college campuses are more diverse than ever before, fraternity/sorority members reported higher levels of interaction with people different from themselves than other students (different race/ethnic groups, different religions, different political orientations), and the largest positive effects were generally found for first-year students, which argues against deferring recruitment until the second semester or second year. Given that the quality of students' first-year experiences affects college success, fraternities and sororities are providing a proven student retention tool while enrollment is on the precipice of steep decline (Pike, 2024).

The research has consistently found positive relationships between engagement and success in college, and they were more likely to be engaged in community service and other co-curricular activities. Further, Pike (2024) reports higher levels of reflective and integrative

learning, student-faculty interaction, and collaborative learning for Fraternity and Sorority members over independent students, which is all in alignment of American higher education values. An important outcome of the study was that system-wide suspensions are antithetical to educational outcomes by eliminating what is working well within these organizations (placing affiliated students into the general population of students) without actually addressing behaviors of concern (Pike, 2024).

According to Grace (2024), Fraternity membership is positively associated with stronger retention and graduation rates, have a higher sense of purpose, practice and develop leadership skills, have greater engagement in career immediately following graduation, and higher reports of well-being later in life. Further, students have more credit hours, higher GPAs during their first year in college, higher communication skills, higher critical thinking abilities, and higher gains in personal and social skills through sorority/fraternity involvement over non-affiliated students (Grace, 2024).

In terms of mental health, research suggests a higher sense of social support among fraternity and sorority members is associated with lower depression levels, higher self-esteem, a greater sense of belonging, and increased sense of autonomy. Not only did membership in the fraternity/sorority community report higher positive mental health scores, but also lower mean scores related to depression and anxiety. Students involved in the fraternity/sorority community have higher rates of lifetime use of therapy or counseling and had higher positive rating of campus support systems (Grace, 2022).

Research conducted by Gallup in 2021 that was published by the North American Interfraternity Conference and the National Panhellenic Conference shows that affiliated alumni are more likely than nonaffiliated alumni to say they felt supported by faculty and mentors, more likely to say they engaged in experiential learning, more likely to find a good job quickly after graduation, more likely to be engaged in their current jobs, are more likely to be satisfied with their lives, and 84% of affiliated alumni said they would still join their fraternity or sorority if they had to do it all over again. In terms of emotional support, the research showed that affiliated alumni were more likely to say they had a professor who cared about them as a person, they had at least one professor who made them excited about learning, and they had a mentor who encouraged them to pursue their goals and dreams. In terms of experiential learning experiences, the research showed that affiliated alumni were more likely to say they had a job or internship that allowed them to apply what they were learning in the classroom, they worked on a project that took a semester or more to complete, and they were extremely active in extracurricular activities.

### **Could Understanding Student Identities Help Solve Hazing & Keep the Positive Aspects?**

Frank Harris III developed a conceptual model (2010) called Men's Identity Development that included men's gender-related attitudes, beliefs, and assumptions, along with their influences and norms (Jones, 2017). Harris (2010) found that masculinities had influences on men's friendship decisions and their college experience, which matches Edward and Jones's theory where men learned those expectations, put on a mask to conform, wear the mask, and then struggle to take the mask off (Jones, 2017). The Edwards study showed that college men had to prove their manhood by partying, not preparing for class, having competitive

heterosexual sex, drinking to excess, and breaking the rules. Harris points out the consequences of these actions, which included misogynistic relationships/attitudes towards women, limited relationships with other men, and a loss of self. Interestingly enough, participants in both the Harris study and the Edwards study showed men who were insecure about themselves and could not live up to the external expectations of masculinity, forcing them to put on a performance (a mask) to cover up the parts of themselves that did not meet those expectations (Harris, 2010).

To investigate this further, Harris and Harper (2015) studied 68 undergraduate men with a range of backgrounds and subgroups, and his findings here showed that parental influences, interactions with same-sex peers, and involvement in youth sports were socializing factors informing their ideas about masculinity. Could understanding masculine identities which students bring to campus actually be the key to solving sexual assaults, hazing, alcohol/drug abuse, and homophobic hate crimes on college campuses? MacNaughton shares that children are socialized to behave in gender-appropriate way through observation, imitation, and modeling. So, the men in the study shared that they learned lessons from their fathers that constituted appropriate male behavior (Harris, 2015), including their toughness, how they treated women entering a room, and hard work as an influence on their gender identity.

Peers took on a big role of influencing conceptions of masculinities to the point where gaining the respect of other male peers revolved around things such as sports, rapping, and being popular with the ladies. In particular, youth sports participation helped to shape confidence, aggressiveness, and popularity, but also created a space for locker-room talk about sexual experiences and those without stories were punished with labels that questioned their

sexual orientation. Harris also points out that this can be reinforced by fathers who expected their sons to engage in patriarchal versions of masculine performativity, while some modeled productive conceptions such as responsibility, integrity, and respect for women (Harris, 2015). So, Harris (2015) suggests identifying the good in them and seeking to replicate those traits in their same-sex peers as part of our programming including reflection on manhood and what that means in places such as orientation (with families), fraternity houses, and athletic groups. As Harris (2010) describes it, “our participants were looking for someone to give them permission to stop being the men they felt they *had* to be and needed permission to be the men they *aspired* to be” (p.56).

### **What is the Role of Alcohol and Drugs?**

Parks (2019) suggests that the root of this excessive alcohol culture are young white men’s anxieties about race and masculinity. There is a discussion on masculinity among white men in the 1960s and 1970s marked by powerful social movements such as women’s rights, civil rights, and gay liberation movements that challenged racial hierarchies and traditional gender roles, leaving white men scrambling to redefine their masculine identity within the home and society. Now, the glory of “breadwinner” loses allure during this period, and is now considered a source of stress, loneliness, and depression. One study (Keenan, 2015) found that Russian men who perceived a loss of dominance (or masculinity) drank heavily to compensate, and alcohol advertisements often reinforce traditional values of masculinity to promote a positive emotive response. National Institutes of Health (2020) studies show that although men comprise less than half of the U.S. population, they consume 75% of alcohol, drink twice as often as women, and become intoxicated twice as often as women. Since men are more likely

than women to engage in excessive drinking, they are also more likely to experience negative consequences such as risky sexual behavior, aggression, and violence. Keenan (2015) highlights the issue by stating that alcohol is a means by which men express masculine ideals, particularly as a coping mechanism for existing inadequacies. Also noted by Parks (2019) is that members of Greek life, and particularly fraternity men, are significantly more likely to drink alcohol and engage in binge-drinking than their non-Greek peers, and more likely to experience the negative consequences of binge-drinking.

One survey (Esteban, 2019) among 2,000 fraternity and sorority members showed that 98% of respondents drank alcohol every week, while only 47% used marijuana or cocaine during a 20-day period. Fifty percent reported having never used drugs other than alcohol. The reason for alcohol misuse among Greek-affiliated students include students self-selecting into peer groups with patterns of heavy alcohol consumption consistent with their own, rewarding alcohol misuse during the socialization process of pledging, Greek housing enables alcohol to play a central role, and fraternity members tend to drink more if they perceive their peers are drinking or approve of drinking. Sorority members are almost twice as likely to be binge drinkers compared to non-sorority women, and as a resident in a fraternity or sorority house, that is also associated with even higher rates of binge drinking. Students tend to overestimate their peers' alcohol consumption levels and then raise their own consumption levels accordingly (Parks, 2019). Also, Parks (2019) makes a correlation between high parent-child conflict and a greater likelihood of negative alcohol-related experiences in the child's first year in college.

According to Parks (2019), personality research shows that individuals will seek environments that align with their disposition, so those engaged in high-risk drinking behaviors prior to college are more likely to seek an environment that is conducive to such behavior in college (self-selection into Greek organizations). Studies also show that Greek life members rely heavily on drinking to better their social reputations, gain acceptance, and increase popularity (Parks, 2019).

So, how does all of this play into hazing and other risky behaviors? The new member consumption of alcohol is based on a system of rewards and punishments where alcohol is viewed as a privilege that represents membership in the fraternity. It encourages the new members to conform to the cultural ideals of the fraternity, and it creates bonding based on extreme loyalty. Sex related issues such as sexual aggression, attitudes, and hyper-masculinity among fraternity members are perpetuated through pornography, sexual ideology, masculinity, and degrading initiation and hazing rituals. Sorority women are 74% more likely to experience rape than other college women, which may be the result of increased interaction with fraternity men and their exposure to alcohol according to Parks. New members of Greek organizations were also three times as likely to have experienced a fall that required medical attention compared to both non-Greek students and Greek members (Parks, 2019).

### **Are Professionals Prepared to Advise Culturally-Based Organizations?**

Garcia (2022) mentions the five foundational areas of working as a Sorority and Fraternity Life Professional as identified by the Association of Fraternity/Sorority Advisors, which includes the governance these organizations adhere to (local, state, national laws,

campus policies, stakeholders), knowledge of fraternity/sorority systems, student safety, student learning, and program administration. This also includes the importance of recognizing and affirming students' diverse identities, embracing our differences, facilitating interactions across differences, advocating for inclusive policies, and addressing social justice and equity within Sorority/Fraternity Life. Specifically, multicultural competence not only requires the ability to work with students different from oneself, but also those who share social identities (Garcia, 2022). Furthermore, he discussed how student affairs professionals should be thinking about hazing and civic liability for Black Greek Letter Organizations, and many professionals do not have the knowledge (history, understanding of culture, awareness of contemporary topics) to help members navigate the nuances of these issues.

Student affairs professionals are exposed to theories and concepts, but rarely were those conversations explicitly tied to practice. In addition, graduate preparatory programs often painted Sorority and Fraternity Life in a negative light or only offered a brief, vague history. It is apparent that not all graduate preparation programs equally prepared participants to work with culturally based organizations. Ways in which professionals have expanded their understanding of norms, processes, and traditions within culturally based organizations was through meeting with chapter presidents, following chapter social media sites, professional associations/networks, and doing research. However, learning differed based on social identities as well as people's affiliation with sororities and fraternities, and one professional shared that he did not want to be that person who admitted these shortcomings. Several student affairs professionals shared they had to prove themselves to students because past

professionals on campus were not reliable or because students expressed skepticism about working with advisors with different identities/affiliations (Garcia, 2022).

### **Hazing Consequences**

Researchers have discussed at length the loss of student life that has been recurring annually since 1958 due to hazing (Nuwer, 2017). While hazing is illegal in most states (44 out of 50), it can still be prosecuted as assault, battery, or other criminal statutes in the remainder states. Hazing activity is banned on campuses and expressly forbidden by the national fraternity and sorority councils. However, underground hazing continues and poses a significant challenge for college administrators (Tingley, 2018). Tingley (2018) points out that under the Cleary Act, campus professionals are bound to disclose criminal incidents on campus annually, including hazing incidents of a criminal nature. One study found that attitudes and beliefs of administrators about hazing law effectiveness is grounded on personal experiences, especially their experiences as undergraduate students. Since there is so much variation that exists in defining hazing at state, institutional, and personal levels, it may be useful to examine personal definitions of hazing based on a theory rooted in organizational leadership and process (Feuer, 2019).

Véliz-Calderón (2017) suggests that hazing impedes the mission of colleges and universities by threatening the health and safety of students, and consequences would include student attrition, abusive campus climates, and negative publicity. Some students will experience Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) symptoms as a result of hazing experiences, as well as re-experiencing the trauma through flashbacks, fear, anxiety, avoidance, and

nightmares according to Johnson. Another important thing to consider is that we cannot predict how each person will be affected by hazing or how each person's past experiences and backgrounds will affect their reaction to the hazing. We should also consider that hazing victims can face additional emotional distress when people outside the Greek chapter view the hazing through social media platforms, which causes the victim even further embarrassment (Johnson, 2017).

When injuries are sustained in a fraternity or sorority hazing incident, plaintiffs pursuing litigation will often name all possible parties as defendants including the national organization, regional, state, and local affiliates, the foundations, and certain chapter officers such as the president, treasurer, the social chairman or the rush chairman. As a consequence, insurance has come to play a significantly important role with respect to fraternities and sororities, and it could be difficult to secure adequate coverage. What is important to note here is that many insurers do not provide coverage for hazing and sexual assault, which are arguably the largest sources of liability for these organizations. The National Association of Insurance Commissioners ranked fraternities as only slightly less risky than hazardous waste disposal companies and asbestos contracts according to Parks. Plaintiffs may also pursue individual fraternity members in further litigation hoping to recover out of those defendants' parents' homeowner's insurance (Parks, 2022).

Johnson (2017) argues that increased governmental and university involvement has risen the level and severity of hazing by driving it underground. If the University kicks a chapter off for hazing, they lose all control over the chapter, and the organization loses any incentives against continuing the hazing that led to their expulsion. Now the chapter no longer has to hide

hazing practices from the university, and these rogue chapters have proven to be just as deadly (Johnson, 2017). A study in 2022 on peer accountability by the North American Interfraternity Conference showed that Fraternity members reported higher levels of understanding of how to practice accountability and the role of intervention in accountability. In the same study, the top barrier to accountability was the fear of the friendship ending, but other challenging issues still remain in accountability such as the involvement of campus administration, getting in trouble with law enforcement or the university, or having their organization closed (Research – NIC, 2023).

There are findings that suggest that student application volume is depressed by scandals with extensive media coverage. Specifically, scandals with more than five mentions in the *New York Times* lead to an 8% drop in applications the following year, and scandals that are covered by long-form magazine articles receive 10% fewer applications the following year, which is roughly as much as falling ten places in the *U.S. News and World Report* college rankings. Both students and prospective donors evaluate university quality by weighing these and other signals before choosing to apply or donate to the college (Rooney, 2019). While public relations funding is typically allocated for marketing to potential new students, increasing dollar amounts are being spent on dealing with the aftermath of a university scandal. The student potentially has experienced physical, emotional, and/or mental instability, sleep deprivation, a loss of control, decline in grades, post-traumatic stress syndrome, a lack of respect for and interest in being part of the organization, as well as suffered relationships with friends, family, and significant others according to Downes. Those who are responsible for the hazing also have

declines in grades and relationships, with the added media scrutiny, damage to their personal reputations, a warped sense of leadership, and feelings of guilt and shame (Downes, 2017).

### **Hazing Prevention Models**

Between 2001 and 2015, Cornell University developed a comprehensive public health hazing prevention model that includes eight elements: leadership and culture change strategies, policy initiatives, educational initiatives, positive team-building, reporting options, enforcement, support for victims, and transparency regarding violations. Their website provides educational information, ideas for non-hazing team-building, a mechanism for submitting reports of hazing on campus, and a list of all student organizations on campus found responsible for hazing that includes descriptions of the behaviors and sanctions imposed for public accountability. At Cornell, the orientation period for new members was reduced from eight weeks to six weeks, and then further reduced to four weeks. Cornell did experience a measurable population decrease in hazing associated with these prevention efforts, with several factors that may have contributed to this outcome (Marchell, 2024). This included strong, public statements against hazing by senior university administrators in the media, policy initiatives such as reducing the orientation period from eight to four weeks, marketing campaigns that communicated the actual norms (instead of perceived norms), positive team building activities, expanded reporting, and transparency regarding violations.

### **Student Experiences**

The qualitative findings by Davis (2023) included several themes among fraternity members at LSU including their collaborative cultures that enhanced members' experiences, an

understanding of the fraternity in broader external cultures, a perception that student affairs practitioners and administrators are “out to get us”, hazing policies and programs are not always effective, and hazing is “not nearly what it used to be.” Implications for practice include targeted hazing prevention programs and policies, an institutional commitment to hazing prevention, build partnerships with the fraternity headquarters, provide alternatives to hazing, and gain a better understanding of the dynamics that exist between chapters and the institution (Davis, 2023).

Often, normalcy bias exists with the logic that if an event has never occurred in our chapter or our community, then that is reason enough to believe that the event will never happen. Each semester institutions attempt to teach hazing prevention, or bystander intervention skills, to address the bandwagon effect where members do not want to create conflict or be shamed for going against the group. Groupthink is another related idea, where people in groups are more concerned with coming to a consensus rather than an accurate decision, implying that members would withhold their criticisms of a decision to promote harmony of the group (Parks & Parisi, 2019). Leaders of student organizations and hazing prevention experts can play a critical role in reducing risk.

### **Hazing Culture and Climate**

A public health approach emphasizes activities that prevent problematic behavior before it begins (primary prevention), intervention (secondary prevention), and response to hazing activities (tertiary prevention) according to Allan (2020). Strategies that are recommended include clear definitions of hazing, assessments of the climate on your campus

(perceptions, motivations, understanding of campus policies, reporting mechanisms), seek out partners from across the institution, make data-informed decisions (characteristics for who is joining our chapters, new member retention rates, campus alcohol data, student organization conduct records, and hazing attitudes/behaviors), ask questions (where is it happening most frequently, what policies are needed, what resources are needed), and create a hazing prevention plan for a comprehensive and campus-wide approach (Allan, 2020). According to Cimino (2019), “in so far as an instance of hazing culture is initially established by the basic motivations to engage in the behavior, it is possible that hazing culture may be neither created nor destroyed, only contingently evoked or suppressed.”

Swan (2023) talks about community readiness starting with community knowledge efforts, leadership support and attitude, community climate toward addressing the issue, community knowledge of the issue, and the resources that could be used to address the issue. It suggests that communities who are further along the readiness continuum experience greater levels of effectiveness and sustainability according to Swan. Campus communities were identified as ready for prevention had fully functioning coalitions with campus-wide representation, and they were trained in hazing prevention for 3 or more years. Other factors included financial support for hazing prevention, sharing of hazing information, and clear anti-hazing policies to address critical domains (family, peers, and community) that influence the development and perpetuation of these behaviors according to Swan (2023).

McCready (2020) suggests that identifying predictors associated with fraternity members’ motivations to engage in social dominance hazing might allow for interventions that could reduce troubling outcomes for new members. As an example, fraternities hanging sexist

welcome banners from their houses may not only harbor misogynistic members, but also may endorse troubling hazing mentalities. Through identification of these predictors, we can implement targeted interventions to improve areas of concern such as misogyny, homophobia, and risky behaviors, but also the endorsement of social dominance hazing through programs that destigmatize intimacy and vulnerability among fraternity men. Social norming efforts with culturally competent approaches such as a campaign that features prominent fraternity men rebuking hegemonic masculine tropes might allow others greater freedom to engage in vulnerability (McCready, 2020).

Sasso (2021) discusses common strategies to detect hazing, including analyzing available data such as academic performance and swipe card access records to buildings and events. Sasso states that identifying knowledgeable stakeholders in your network for conversations about hazing behaviors might be helpful, such as parents, university staff, student leaders, and student workers. Sasso also points out that you can observe behavior in the new members such as changes in communication patterns, changes in physical appearance, social isolation, and a decrease in social media usage. Finally, one can review reporting mechanisms such as hazing hotlines and hazing report forms as reporting tools (Sasso, 2021).

Westol (2008) describes the hazer as someone lacking courage, self-confidence, and self-esteem. They are using hazing as a means of justifying their place in a group, and they consider it their designated role in the organization (as opposed to being a treasurer or other position) according to Westol. Watching and listening for hazing is important, such as conformity in dress/appearance, carrying a number of items, emphasis on “pledge class unity” to objectify the new members, greeting for brothers/sisters, concealment of the chapter house

windows during pre-initiation, and unusual hours for meetings or events such as late at night or early in the morning. The key is to detect hazing in time to intervene and ideally change the culture in the chapter according to Westol (2008).

Johnson (2017) argues that anonymous over the phone and online tip lines would help students to submit evidence of hazing that may possess without the fear of the fraternity/sorority knowing who reported the image. The Greek Anti-Hazing Hotline was established in 2007 and is sponsored by 47 national and international Greek organizations to describe hazing taking place at their university. Transmission then occurs to the headquarters of the fraternity or sorority named in the report. Johnson finds that universities who have their own websites to gather this evidence will be more effective for prosecution because of organizational secrecy and a lack of cooperation in the Greek organization can pose challenges. Some students may come forward in reporting another chapter because they are giving the rest of Greek Life a bad name. Furthermore, Johnson suggests hazing prevention education at freshman seminars or orientation. Specifically, universities should educate that not only is hazing illegal, but instead identify what is hazing and the damage it can do to our students. Counseling services and support groups can be offered to students who are victims of hazing, as well as educating the new members on responsible social media use (as well as how Greek life should be portrayed) instead of policing each individual post. Johnson is an advocate for state laws mandating all public universities to develop, implement, and enforce hazing prevention programs for all students (not just Greek students) to report violations and help protect their classmates. This could be particularly effective if students learn they are not alone in their beliefs against hazing after talking to other students at these educational programs, and they

would no longer fear being isolated for speaking out against hazing. By focusing on education, rather than enforcement and policing of chapters, chapters are now motivated to make their own decision to stop hazing based on the principles set forth in Reactance Theory. If the university is not in compliance, they could be at risk to lose some of their state funding (Johnson, 2017).

Some other suggestions are shared by Johnson, including increasing incentives to initiate new members earlier in the semester because the overall risk of hazing-related incidents would decrease. By publishing this information of the length of new member program for each chapter on the Greek Affairs office website, students would be informed when deciding which chapter to join. Also, school-sponsored Greek events for the major events of pledging (such as bid day, big/little reveal) can help to avoid heavy drinking often associated with these events. Planning bid day on a day when there are school-wide events going on (such as a school football game, concert, or volunteering) could be a healthier alternative that avoids binge drinking. Also, replacing Greek Paddles that are often associated with violence and hazing with plaques or pledge class t-shirts still allows for customization at a lower price without the negative connotation (Johnson, 2017).

Effective hazing prevention trainings are important in actually reaching the students and changing the behavior. In one study by Alexander and Opsal (2021), a member of a fraternity and club sports team explained the ineffectiveness of prior hazing prevention trainings by saying, "it's kind of repetitive, it's the same B.S. kind of stuff like don't do it and it doesn't focus on the why as opposed to giving alternatives and saying here's what you could do instead, here's other team-building options." In the anti-hazing messaging, we must go beyond the

dangers of hazing and instead talk about ways to strengthen group solidarity that are pro-social to get the same loyalties that they reference (purpose, discipline, and tradition) according to Alexander and Opsal (2021). When working with student leaders who look forward to a prosperous academic life and future career, focusing on how hazing can be disastrous to their future even if they are not the ones perpetrating the hazing, as well as how their status as an organization may suffer, more hazing may be prevented or reported by the student leaders. Malaret makes a good point by mentioning that if the student leaders find the training helpful, more students are likely to complete it. Think about incentives for student leaders who complete hazing prevention training instead of punishments for students who do not complete the training, and in the training, think about improving decision-making skills, how we can change negative group behavior, conflict resolution skills, and how to onboard new members safely while building group unity (Malaret, 2021).

### **Institutional Responses to Hazing**

We must also apply the rules consistently across student organizations. Another interview by Alexander & Opsal (2021) with a junior member of a fraternity and a club sports team explained that the institution and its stakeholders are more committed to the value of revenue produced by athletic teams than they are to equitable policing and prevention of hazing. They noted, “with the big sports teams like football, it’s kind of untouchable status. We just built the stadium for them, they need to perform, the need to do their stuff, let them do what they need to do to get shit done! The fraternities and sororities are kind of like the red-headed step-child to the prodigal son of D-1 sports teams.” According to Malaret (2021), hazing still happens in the absence of fraternities and sororities, and efforts to address hazing need to

be targeted more generally to all students to change campus culture rather than designing policies and interventions that target only Greek organizations, athletic teams, marching bands, and other distinct student groups. Similar to a Title IX investigator, Malaret suggests we should consider a hazing prevention staff member that is accessible to all students (not just Fraternity and Sorority Life) to provide more comprehensive visibility to hazing and how it can affect any student while sending a strong message that hazing is not tolerated.

Esquenazi (2021) highlights Langford's approach to successful hazing interventions that include addressing attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions, supporting healthy group norms, conveying clear expectations, disseminating comprehensive policies, providing support services, and establishing comprehensive drug, alcohol, and hazing prevention programs. The key is for administrators to understand the factors contributing to these behaviors that are campus and context-specific, as well as the support and connection of multiple stakeholders. In order to create effective policies and build relationships on campus, adequate staffing and continuity of staff members is critical, as well as senior university officials playing a more significant role in leading cultural change within fraternity and sorority communities. Campus-wide pauses for fraternity and sorority activities have only a short-term impact, and can lead to a sense of loss for students even when it is only temporary. Stronger relationships are needed between national partners and the institutions because administrators have felt that fraternal partners are more worried about dollars and cents rather than student safety coupled with a lack of trust, while national offices felt blindsided by the campus-wide pause and are not involved in these conversations. If the national organization supported or even encouraged local chapters to disaffiliate from the university after the implementation of a campus-wide pause, this

impacts the relationship with the university, and groups who do affiliate struggle to recruit and retain membership without institutional support (Esquenazi, 2021). Furthermore, it's a problem when campus professionals often reported spending more time responding to incidents than planning and implementing primary prevention (Malaret, 2021).

Nuwer (2018) discusses bystander intervention, alcohol-free fraternity houses, putting an end to the pledge period, delaying recruitment until a student's second semester, putting responsible live-in adults in fraternity/sorority houses, and orientation programming on hazing and substance abuse for the parents. He also stresses moving from self-governance in fraternities to university control, accountability, and requiring transparency of all schools by publishing all infractions on their websites.

Malaret (2021) suggests developing better plans to encourage students to report, prevent, and advocate for themselves and others against hazing behaviors. There should be different levels of penalty to protect individuals who report hazing from retaliation, as well as protect organizations if they openly admit to hazing and want to remove the perpetrators from their organization. Having reporting protections in place may increase the likelihood that students prevent and report the hazing behaviors (Malaret, 2021).

Ayalon (2021) points out that it's time to align the goals of fraternity and sorority with the goals of higher education in terms of graduation rates and retention rates, and one way to do that would be to develop a new member education program that took place over all four years of college to keep members engaged throughout the entire undergraduate experience, reduce the power differential between members in the chapter, and reach initiation into the

fraternity or sorority upon graduation. Ayalon believes this would help our retention rates, create more engaged alumni by reducing the seniors who are completely disengaged, apathy in our chapters would be reduced, the fraternity or sorority experience would be more relevant as the student needs change over time, we would be perfectly aligned with higher education, and we would reduce the number of hazing incidents. This strategy would also increase the overall satisfaction with the university experience and create even more loyal alumni (Ayalon, 2021).

Swofford (2020) points out that fraternities are rarely prosecuted in connection with student deaths, as the first criminal charge against a fraternity for a hazing-related death did not occur until 1998, when a fraternity was indicted by a Boston grand jury for criminal manslaughter and misdemeanor hazing in connection with the death of a pledge at the fraternity's Massachusetts Institute of Technology chapter. The District Attorney in that case did not pursue individual charges against the chapter members citing that the traditions and actions of the fraternity as a whole were responsible according to Swofford. Swofford (2020) suggests three points of a hazing triangle as a solution, which includes individual deterrence (felony penalties against individuals who cause injury or death by hazing), fraternity deterrence to hold them accountable, as well as host-institutional deterrence that ensures compliance with an independent commissioner tasked with monitoring and reporting hazing violations.

Knight (2024) has findings that could help with hazing prevention in the future, in that fraternity participants had rarely seen the formal accountability structure in their chapter referred to as a judicial board, and it was almost always theoretical. This opens up opportunities to exercise the judicial board on a regular basis to ensure systems of accountability are actually working. In terms of informal accountability, Knight found that

changes in behavior were more likely to occur when that informal accountability came from a brother they had a strong relationship with (likely from the same new member class), or a chapter leader. The outcomes that were most likely to cause change included the threat of getting kicked out of the fraternity or social probation for not being able to go out, drink, and meet women for one to two weeks. Masculinity was a significant source of setting expectations in the chapter, and informal accountability usually included shame and embarrassment, but because maintaining a masculine identity was so key to the perception of a chapter's success, it was extremely rare that a chapter would hold someone accountable for doing anything that could be considered masculine even if the behavior was problematic. If a person was very dominant, loud, and perceived to be well-liked, it was less likely they would be held accountable by their peers. Members who were older would rarely be approached by younger members, and power was associated with leadership roles. Knight also discusses the herd mentality in fraternities that had become so pervasive that it impacted recruitment and selection of new members who would fit in to the status quo, or essentially only recruit members who would pose little resistance to the unwritten rules. He highlights that brothers believed the student body's opinion of them held significant weight as to where in the campus fraternity hierarchy a chapter was placed, so that could stop a situation from getting out of hand and potentially damaging the chapter's reputation. Knight (2024) also found systems in place to ostracize those who were not like the herd, and senior members or recent graduates helped to pass down the informal expectations to ensure the herd did not change over time. One must consider these findings when approaching hazing prevention.

Downes (2017) suggests that universities, lawmakers, and the fraternities themselves can impose harsher penalties to hazers. Sanctions may come from the university in the form of revocation of housing benefits, scholarships, and financial assistance, while the fraternal organization can impose membership sanctions such as probation, suspension, or expulsion. Organizations can suspend terminate officer duties and/or membership, and chapters may be forced to close along with civil damages that are levied against the organization. The hazing scandals at Sigma Alpha Epsilon led to changes in their fraternity governance that eliminates the class structure between new members and active members, and collegiate members are initiated within 96 hours (Downes, 2017).

Meriwether (2020) puts the focus on developing a culture of reporting and responsiveness, new student and parent programs, digital education tools such as social media, as well as considering campus environmental factors and peer education. By developing a cyclical and evolving process to maintaining engagement around hazing prevention that empowers members of the campus community to take action and report unsafe activities, it dismantles the willingness to silently participate in these rituals and we can save the lives of students (Meriwether, 2020).

Wiese (2024) suggests that most often the media reports on sordid hazing stories, but the recent viral media coverage of fraternity men at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill standing against a mob to defend the American flag captivated our country due to their patriotism, civility, and camaraderie. Ideally, we should be promoting responsible students who seek friendship and personal growth in fraternities and sororities instead of restricting or eliminating these single-sex groups where they are often undergoing disproportionate

investigations and shut downs for minor offenses. Wiese also points out that when fraternity members fall short of their group's standards there is accountability, such as the recent case at the University of Mississippi where a chapter member confronted a protester in a racist manner and his membership was immediately revoked due to the offensive action that is contradictory to the fraternal values. Wiese (2024) concludes by saying it should not seem unusual for fraternity men to demonstrate courage and selfless patriotism, and if all colleges would support and expand Greek Life, these values would be more common in collegiate life today.

### **The Role of Alumni in Preventing Hazing**

Parks (2021) discusses the role and influence of fraternity and sorority alumni in addressing the hazing problem. He notes that fraternity and sorority alumni will still donate heavily even when their chapter is shut down because the Greek experience magnifies one's gratitude to their college. Parks referenced Bruggink and Siddiqui's 1995 study, which showed that fraternity and sorority alumni donated four times as much as their non-Greek counterparts, and account for 75% of all total college and university donations. The gap between tuition and actual costs for the university is covered by alumni funding, so schools are relying on the financial support of Greek alumni to keep operating, and it prevents universities from being harsh on the wrongdoings committed by fraternities and sororities according to Parks. He goes on to say regarding the alumni, "the power they wield only strengthens their word and validates their actions with collegiate members" (p.116). Specifically in Black Greek-letter fraternities, alumni often provide conflicting positions on hazing, which further confuses the issue for current members. In formal settings, Black Greek-letter alumni will denounce hazing, but in backstage social settings, they describe the current membership process as easy

in comparison to their own initiation process and the undergraduates interpret these statements as pressure to continue hazing. Organizations must ensure that a high degree of ethics is maintained. In how the organization conducts its internal affairs, toxic leaders should be removed from office, the organizations' work must be focused on their members, senior members should be trained on how to mentor new members, new members should be trained on how to operate, and new members should be assigned mentors to help them assimilate according to Parks (2021).

Allan (2024) also looks at the role of affiliated alumni as important stakeholders in higher education and involvement in charitable giving, while also exploring their volunteerism and political advocacy. Findings from college students who experienced hazing were that 25% reported that alumni were present during the activities. In a follow up study at seven different universities, 29% of students who experienced hazing reported that alumni were present during the activities, males were more likely to report alumni presence during hazing, and students who identified as racially minoritized were more likely than white counterparts to report alumni involvement in hazing (Allan, 2024).

Furthermore, alumni involvement and influence, as a form of white normativity, emerged as an important theme of tradition where alumni play a critical role in passing down and maintaining hazing. One staff member in the Allan survey from an institution commented, "There are significant relics of the old boys' club here. And yet, over the last couple of decades the demographic population of students has dramatically shifted. And so, there's this ongoing living tension between the current student community and the deeply entrenched old white boys' club traditions that are a part of the institution" (p.9). Another illuminating comment

from the Allan research was a staff member at an institution said, “Our alumni stay involved with their residence. You’ll see them all over campus all the time. So with that comes, this is how we did it, and it worked great. Look at us, and we’re successful, you can be successful too. What would you change this? This sauce works, the sauce is good” (p.9). Yet another comment from the Allan research was a staff member at an institution that explained the alumni point of view as, “Oh yeah, we used to do this. Why don’t you do this anymore? They left, but they haven’t left. So, they still have their hand in the cookie jar” (p.9). This is where we have to consider the power dynamics with alumni who donate to the institution, to the organization, and many serve on housing board of directors, which we know is a critical component of the fraternity or sorority experience on college campuses. Another comment from the Allan research from a faculty member was, “The alumni are a very powerful group here, very influential, especially in the fraternity/sorority world. They don’t like when you push at changing some of their traditions, no matter what they are. They are strong and powerful and their voices are loud on this campus” (p.10). Allan (2024) describes a student who knows that hazing is wrong and not tolerated, but also if the fraternity or sorority is strong enough, you can get away with almost anything if you have alumni donations in place or if the Office of Fraternity and Sorority Affairs likes you.

## **Conclusion**

This comprehensive review of literature identifies who is typically experiencing hazing, what is hazing, why hazing occurs, what are the different types of hazing that exists, how gender identity relates to hazing, and why it has been so difficult to combat hazing over the last century. Despite all the negatives associated with hazing behaviors, we did find significant

moral and psychosocial development happening in college fraternities and sororities. Studies have shown increases in student engagement, learning, college satisfaction, and mental health for students who are affiliated, and this is of primary concern to college administrators who are desperately trying to increase retention and graduation rates. If we come to a better understanding of student identities and the role of alcohol and drugs, we could reduce the frequency and severity of hazing incidents. Furthermore, Fraternity and Sorority life professionals must be better prepared to advise various councils on campus, to identify warning signs of hazing earlier, and share best practices on intervention.

## CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

### Introduction

College Fraternities and Sororities continue to come under fire from critics for exclusionary practices, sexist behavior, alcohol and drug abuse, as well as hazing practices that have put students in harm's way. However, proponents of the Fraternity and Sorority community believe it is the best leadership experience on a college campus as it builds communication skills, higher retention rates, higher graduation rates, a commitment to community service, more job prospects from a larger network, and higher alumni engagement (Zhang, 2016).

Given that thirteen percent of male students with full time enrollment in host institutions are fraternity members, Fraternity and Sorority alumni have higher donations than non-Greek students, and the total value of fraternity houses nationwide is at least three billion dollars to supplement student housing on these campuses according to Swofford (2020), there is tremendous value to the Fraternity and Sorority experience. By engaging in this research, we can eliminate confusion as to what hazing is, detect hazing activity early, and intervene before students are injured across various councils.

### Restatement of the Problem and Research Questions

Every year since 1958 there has been at least one hazing death according to Hank Nuwer's Hazing Clearinghouse. That same Hazing Clearinghouse points to 1 hazing death every 4 months since 2000. It is extremely complicated to get a handle on the problem when 95% of cases where students identified their hazing experience, they did not report it to campus officials, and 9 out of 10 students who experienced hazing in college did not consider

themselves to be hazed (Allan, 2023). In order to make progress in reducing hazing on college campuses, we must have uniform definitions of hazing and then a uniform federal anti-hazing law. Currently, each state has their own definition of hazing, some states have no law against hazing in particular, each campus has their own definition and adjudication of hazing offenses in their student code of conduct, and every national fraternity or sorority defines it differently in their national bylaws. We should not be surprised when students give up saying “I don’t know where the line is, so everything is hazing”. Intervention by student affairs professionals has a wide range according to their own experiences, regional trends, relationships with the national fraternity or sorority in question, relationships with alumni of that chapter, and the risk tolerance of the university itself.

The research questions are as follows:

- **RQ1:** How do student affairs professionals describe their definition of hazing?
- **RQ2:** How is hazing prevention and intervention addressed through practices, priorities, and policies?

There have been many quantitative studies in hazing with college fraternities and sororities, but there is inadequate research in qualitative studies. Also, many of the recent studies have focused on surveying college students, but there has been a need for research and data collection from student affairs administrators and Fraternity/Sorority Advisors that work directly with these students on behalf of the institution. For example, Davis (2023) contributed a mixed methods study on hazing and organizational culture in historically white fraternities by surveying college students at Louisiana State University.

## **Research Design**

This study utilized a phenomenological research approach to explore how student affairs professionals described their definition of hazing (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This approach provided a more consistent definition of hazing nationwide, identified intervention points to improve student safety, and evaluated hazing prevention strategies through practices, priorities, and policies.

In this qualitative study, I reported lived experiences surrounding the phenomenon of hazing on campus for student affairs professionals revealed common meaning in what they have experienced and how they experienced it. Taking a constructivist worldview, I constructed the meaning of hazing forged in the interviews with student affairs professionals and interpreted the findings, but also recognized that my own background shapes that interpretation (Creswell, 2018). The phenomenological design allows a comparison of the lived experiences of these student affairs professionals around the topic of hazing as described by the participants themselves (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

## **Population and Sample**

An email invitation to student affairs professionals (N = 20) who currently supervise Fraternity and Sorority Life students on their campus at the time of the interview in the fall of 2024. The email invitation and the consent form are included in Appendix B and Appendix C. This purposeful sampling enables the researcher to intentionally sample a group of people that can best inform the researcher about this specific research problem that is currently under examination. Each have stories to tell about their lived experiences with hazing, and maximum variation sampling will be used to find different perspectives based on different regional

locations of the institution, public versus private institutions, as well as differences in the sizes of the institutions (Creswell, 2018). Nine of the student affairs professionals, six men and three women, consented to participate in the study. I assigned a pseudonym to each participant to protect the professionals' personal identities. Table 1 presents the demographic backgrounds of the participants.

**Table 1**

*Demographic characteristics of the participants*

Pseudonym	Council Affiliation	Councils Advising	Years in Position	Region	Public or Private
Adam	IFC	4	8	South	Public
Ben	IFC	4	5	Northeast	Public
Chad	IFC	4	Less than 1	Northeast	Public
Debbie	Panhellenic	2	Over 10	Northeast	Public
Elisa	MGC	1	7	South	Private
Fiona	Panhellenic	2	Less than 1	South	Public
Gary	IFC	4	3	Midwest	Private
Henry	MGC	3	8	West	Public
Ian	IFC	4	Over 10	West	Public

### **Instrumentation**

Interviews were selected because I am trying to understand the world from the subjects' point of view, unfold the meaning of their experience, and uncover their lived world. For phenomenological projects, inquirers rely primarily on interviews as data (Creswell, 2018). All interviews will be conducted and recorded on Zoom to minimize any travel expenses and will be transcribed in the fall of 2024. The full interview protocol is available in Appendix A. Prior to each interview, an introduction was given explaining that all information will be held confidential, their participation was voluntary, and I did not intend to inflict any harm. The

interview started with demographic questions to understand how long each student affairs professional has been working with the institution, the council that their own fraternity or sorority is affiliated with, and which council(s) they are currently advising. Next, I wanted to understand their definition of hazing and the degree to which hazing exists on their campus. Finally, I explored their instructional priorities and practices by asking how hazing prevention and intervention is addressed through practices, priorities, and policies on their campus, early warning signs of hazing on their campus, differences in hazing (councils, male vs. female), as well as intervention points.

### **Data Collection Procedures**

Adhering to Clark Moustakas's (1994) phenomenological method, I conducted semi-structured interviews and encouraged student affairs professionals to describe their experiences from their own perspectives, systematically interpret the interview transcripts, extracting themes common across interviews, and then creating a conceptual link (Creswell, 2018). The interviews with these nine student affairs professionals, each of which lasted approximately 45 minutes, focused on their personal experiences with hazing, their experiences in advising students on their campus who have experienced hazing, and the strategies they employed for hazing prevention and intervention on their campus. The interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed on Zoom. The recording and transcripts were secured on a password protected computer in a faculty member's office.

### **Data Analysis Procedures**

According to Creswell (2018), data analysis involves organizing the data, conducting a preliminary read-through, coding and organizing themes, representing the data, and forming an

interpretation. I reviewed the interview transcripts multiple times to gain a general sense of participants' experiences of advising Fraternity and Sorority students on their campus, as well as the practices, priorities, and policies around hazing prevention/intervention. Second, using deductive and in-vivo coding techniques, I explored similarities and differences among the interview transcripts. According to Creswell & Creswell (2018), codes will fall into one of three categories including expected codes, surprising codes, and codes of unusual or conceptual interest so I can compare, categorize, and label quotes. Initially, seven deductive coding categories were created: "Undergraduate Experiences", "Professional Experiences", "Signs of Hazing", "Differences Between Councils", "Prevention Activities", "Intervention Activities", and "Lessons Learned". A combined second cycle of coding (inductive coding) was used including thematic analysis coding, pattern coding, and theoretical coding. It was later reduced to three themes: "inconsistencies", "building trust and early interventions", and "funding and capacity issues".

### ***Positionality, Reflexivity, and Trustworthiness of the Findings***

Reflexivity was maintained by keeping a reflective journal and memos to track evolving perspectives or biases throughout the research process. To ensure transparency and mitigate bias, the researcher sought feedback on the interview questions from classmates and incorporated their suggestions. Direct quotes from participants were used to reserve the authenticity of their experiences. The researcher also shared the interview transcripts with the dissertation chair for review, ensuring alignment and accuracy in theme development. To ensure trustworthiness of the findings, transcripts were sent back to the participants for member checking and feedback. In addition, I conducted peer briefings with other doctoral

students to ensure appropriate interpretation of the qualitative data. These strategies were employed to ensure the study’s trustworthiness based on the criteria outlined by Lincoln and Guba (1985) of internal validity (credibility) by confirming the accuracy of the data, external validity (transferability) by providing detailed description of the research, reliability (dependability) by maintaining an audit trail of all processes, and objectivity (neutrality) where biases are acknowledged and mitigated throughout the process.

**Table 2**

*Logic of Research Design*

Research Question	Corresponding Source of Information	Corresponding Data Analysis/Reporting Procedures
RQ 1: How do student affairs professionals describe their definition of hazing?	Interview Questions Set II, 1-2	Descriptive Statistics Initial and thematic analysis coding, pattern coding, and theoretical coding
RQ 2: How is hazing prevention and intervention addressed through practices, priorities, and policies?	Interview Question Set III, 1	Descriptive Statistics Initial and thematic analysis coding, pattern coding, and theoretical coding

<p>RQ 2a: What are the visible warning signs of hazing?</p>	<p>Interview Questions Set III, 2-3 filtered by elementary responses</p>	<p>Descriptive Statistics Initial and thematic analysis coding, pattern coding, and theoretical coding</p>
<p>RQ 2b: What are the differences in hazing according to race and sex?</p>	<p>Interview Questions Set III, 4-5 filtered by secondary responses</p>	<p>Descriptive Statistics Initial and thematic analysis coding, pattern coding, and theoretical coding</p>
<p>RQ 2c: When do student affairs professionals intervene?</p>	<p>Interview Questions Set III, 6-7</p>	<p>Descriptive Statistics Initial and thematic analysis coding, pattern coding, and theoretical coding</p>
<p>RQ 2d: What lessons can I learn from student affairs professionals and their experiences around hazing?</p>	<p>Interview Questions Set III, 8-10</p>	<p>Descriptive Statistics Initial and thematic analysis coding, pattern coding, and theoretical coding</p>

## **Summary**

This phenomenological research design will help the industry develop a more consistent definition of hazing across the entire country, identify intervention points to improve student safety, and evaluate hazing prevention strategies through practices, priorities, and policies. I believe it will help to reduce the current statistic of 1 hazing death every 4 months by giving college students a common definition of hazing that I can use in every state, illuminating the early warning signs of hazing to new and existing student affairs professionals that might have limitations of their understanding of hazing to their own council, and establishing generally accepted intervention points that are consistent between all institutions, no matter where they are physically located or whether they are at a public or private institution.

## CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

### Introduction

This chapter presents findings from personal interviews with nine student affairs professionals who advise Fraternity and Sorority communities from every region of the country, in both public and private institutions. The study aimed to provide insights into these student affairs professionals' experiences around the phenomenon of hazing, including definitions, early warning signs of hazing activities, and intervention points. Before discussing the thematic findings, it was important to understand the participants' backgrounds and demographics, as these factors shaped their experiences and feelings on hazing. The research questions that guided this study were:

- **RQ1:** How do student affairs professionals describe their definition of hazing?
- **RQ2:** How is hazing prevention and intervention addressed through practices, priorities, and policies?

### Participant Demographic Information

Nine participants representing student affairs professionals from diverse campuses contributed to this study. All participants were full time student affairs professionals currently advising fraternities and sororities on their college campus. The gender distribution included 3 females and 6 males on college campuses in various regions, with both public and private institutions represented. This diversity is critical to understanding the variety of experiences within hazing. For confidentiality, all participants were assigned pseudonyms to protect their

identities, ensuring ethical standards in the research process. Table 1 on page 75 summarizes the demographic information.

### **Organization of Data**

This study's data was gathered using a qualitative phenomenological approach to explore the lived experiences of student affairs professionals at universities, both public and private, in various regions of the United States. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews on Zoom, followed by thematic analysis. The thematic structure allowed for the identification of recurring patterns related to participants' definitions of hazing, their prevention practices, and their intervention policies.

### **Data Collection**

The data was collected through nine individual interviews lasting between 30 to 90 minutes, allowing participants to describe their experiences in detail.

### **Thematic Analysis**

The transcript data was analyzed using Dedoose software to facilitate the coding process, allowing for the efficient organization, management, and analysis of the data and ensuring accuracy in theme development. Initially, seven deductive coding categories were created, including: "Undergraduate Experiences", "Professional Experiences", "Signs of Hazing", "Differences Between Councils", "Prevention Activities", "Intervention Activities", and "Lessons Learned". A combined second cycle of coding (inductive coding) was used including thematic analysis coding, pattern coding, and theoretical coding.

In the theme development phase, codes were grouped into overarching themes that captured core aspects of participants' experiences. Particularly their feelings of inconsistencies,

the importance of building trust and early interventions, as well as funding and capacity issues in their department. The themes were then reviewed and refined to ensure they accurately reflected the data and aligned with the study's objectives. Finally, the reporting phase systematically presented the themes supported by direct quotes from participants to give voice to their experiences.

### **Data Saturation**

Nine individual interviews reached data saturation. Subsequent data collection did not reveal new themes, confirming that the sample size was sufficient to address the research questions.

### **Presentation of Findings**

This section presents the study's findings, highlighting key themes from the data analysis of interviews. The study explored the experiences of nine student affairs professionals at various institutions throughout the United States viewed hazing definitions, early warning signs, and intervention points with their students.

Through a thematic analysis of qualitative data, several major themes were identified that reflect the participants' experiences of inconsistencies, building trust and early interventions, as well as funding and capacity issues. The table below summarizes the themes, codes, and participants contributing to each theme.

**Table 3***Themes, Sub-Theme, Codes, and Participants*

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Sub-Theme</b>	<b>Codes</b>	<b>Participants Contributing to the Theme</b>
<b>Inconsistencies</b>	Definition of Hazing		Adam, Ben, Chad, Debbie, Elisa, Fiona, Gary, Henry, Ian
	Hazing Activities	Professional Experiences, Signs of Hazing, Differences Between Councils	Adam, Chad, Debbie, Elisa, Fiona, Henry, Ian
	Actions vs. Values	Professional Experiences, Signs of Hazing, Differences Between Councils	Adam, Ben, Chad, Debbie, Elisa, Gary, Henry, Ian
	Prevention & Reporting	Prevention Activities, Intervention Activities	Adam, Chad, Debbie, Elisa, Fiona, Henry, Ian
<b>Trust and Early Intervention</b>	Building Trust	Lessons Learned	Adam, Ben, Chad, Debbie, Elisa, Fiona, Gary, Henry, Ian
	Early Intervention	Lessons Learned	Adam, Ben, Chad, Debbie, Elisa, Fiona, Gary, Henry, Ian
<b>Funding and Capacity Issues</b>	N/A	Prevention Activities, Intervention Activities, Lessons Learned	Chad, Debbie, Elisa, Fiona, Henry

**Participant 1: Adam**

Adam has been working at his public institution in the South for 8 years, and he oversees 4 councils. Adam is affiliated with an IFC fraternity. When asked about his definition of

hazing, he laughed and explained that his communities cannot seem to come to an agreement on what that is. Adam provided an example as scavenger hunts, where Panhellenic would consider that as a hazing activity, yet students do them all the time within residence life. He later defined it as “any activity that does not serve an educational purpose that either intentionally or recklessly endangers another for the purpose of joining an organization” (Adam, personal communication, October 16, 2024). In Adam’s view, student affairs professionals and parents need to be careful about lumping together hazardous drinking and hazing into the same bucket, and by using grieving parents to talk about hazing prevention, it can cause confusion. If a student goes to a party to celebrate that he received a bid (or an invitation to join the fraternity) and he drinks too much and dies, that is an absolute tragedy, but maybe the education needs to be around responsible alcohol consumption. By raising the drinking age to 21, lawmakers created that vacuum.

Hazing is prevalent on his campus and they have had a number of temporary suspensions of social activities within Fraternity and Sorority Life because of the anti-hazing work that has been done. Since students are empowered to speak up and speak out, that has increased the number of investigations done. After a death on campus due to hazing, the university administration pledged to the family of the student who died that the university will continue to be transparent in their hazing prevention and intervention initiatives.

The campus has implemented a hazing prevention task force that is very action oriented instead of being bureaucratic. The task force is made up of students, faculty, staff, families of those impacted by hazing on their campus, as well as community members. The responsibility of the task force is to educate the campus on what is the hazing state law, what is the

institutional policy, build advocates on campus who know how to report hazing, build a hazing prevention website, and provide trainings through the hazing prevention advocacy network. This task force is engaging students through intentional partnerships on campus such as Fraternity and Sorority Life, Student Government, and a health and wellness committee. The university has anonymous reporting available on campus, and the students observe hazing prevention week activities annually (Adam, personal communication, October 16, 2024).

In terms of the signs that are visible to the campus community, Adam sees physical violence every weekend, including his first week on the job when “a fraternity president who came in black and blue, bruised eyes and everything” (Adam, personal communication, October 16, 2024). In terms of the types of hazing that happens, he typically sees calisthenics, embarrassment, dressing a certain way, and servitude. The new members feel that they need to be together at all times. A new trend that he sees is “PledgeTok”, which is where new members are filming dance routines or activities in front of sorority houses on campus and uploading the video to TikTok and getting thousands of views. Adam felt that this new trend is making student affairs professionals re-examine what is hazing and what is not hazing. In this case, the university does not have victims because the new members do not perceive that they are being hazed, it is entertainment to them. “I’m not sure they would even consider it hazing at all. They’re doing something silly outside the sorority houses. Good morning to the lovely ladies of Delta Gamma” (Adam, personal communication, October 16, 2024). Also, the fraternity and sorority community on this campus specifically engages in inter-organizational bigs and littles. Essentially, students can be in a fraternity and have a big sister in a sorority on campus, which is completely arbitrary, but it has meaning for the students.

Adam has seen specific jobs going to individual new members in fraternities, such as “the weather pledge who has to text the group and say what the weather’s going to be, or the breakfast pledge and he uses his meal swipes to swipe the brothers in”. Clearly the new member saw some benefit to this activity because Adam could recount the full conversation with this excited new member who could not stop talking about his new member experience.

“I never had anyone that would eat breakfast with me because I get up early for an 8 AM chemistry class. So, I love this. In fact, after pledging is over, I hope you guys will keep coming to breakfast with me, and I have unlimited swipes. So it’s really kind of great” (Adam, personal communication, October 16, 2024). Adam felt that in this case, there was no clear victim.

In sororities, Adam felt they were very structured. “They’re so petrified of hazing that their new member process is an absolute joke, women are given gifts every week. It is just people walking on eggshells until they’re initiated”. This causes problems with accountability in the sorority later. Adam describes it as, “you were giving me baskets of gifts. Now you’re telling me I had to do something. Now you’re telling me I have to live in this house, and if not, I have to pay this exorbitant amount in parlor fees” (Adam, personal communication, October 16, 2024). However, house mothers and advisors are monitoring the activities constantly, so there are not as many opportunities for hazing to occur. Typically, the activities are seen as passive aggressive, such as only inviting certain women in the new member class to attend an event at the house where some sisters live.

When looking at the differences between traditionally white fraternities and sororities versus multicultural organizations and historically black fraternities and sororities, Adam notes, “white people don’t know how to keep their mouth shut, I think that comes from a position of privilege” (Adam, personal communication, October 16, 2024). He felt that the multicultural and historically black fraternities and sororities treat their membership truly as lifelong membership, and because of that, they keep their activities very private.

The intervention point on campus was when there was a death on campus due to hazing. Adam had family members that attended the institution, and “the stories they shared with me scared me to death”. When pressed further, Adam said, “we, as a society, we agree on certain things. We agree that you should wear your seatbelt. We agree that you should not be taking hard drugs. We don’t agree that hazing does or does not have a place on campus. I do think that there are people in decision making authorities that do think, to a certain extent, these behaviors are acceptable” (Adam, personal communication, October 16, 2024).

Some of the lessons that Adam has learned on the job include that the Greek Life person is always going to be considered the hazing expert, whether they have earned that or not. When talking about hazing prevention, he felt that the best argument one can make is relying on the fact that fraternities and sororities do now know what students are bringing to the table in terms of their life experiences and trauma in their lives before arriving in college. Also, the more people who report hazing, that shows that hazing prevention work is actually working, and should take that as a huge win. Adam felt that it will also be a win when there is a definition of hazing at the Federal level, it is a win when universities have to disclose every

hazing case on their campus, but Adam still questions why private organizations are not required to do the same.

### **Participant 2: Ben**

Ben has been working at his public institution in the Northeast for 5 years, he is affiliated with an IFC fraternity, and he is advising 4 councils on his campus. He defines hazing as any physical or emotional harm during a new member period. Ben believes there are logic flaws in the student definition and their understanding of hazing. Students will generally agree with campus administrators and student affairs professionals when talking about hazing prevention, but that is because their definition of hazing is different than campus definitions of hazing. Administrators must be very specific and clear on the definition of hazing, otherwise when the students are confronted, they will say “this is not hazing to us” (Ben, personal communication, October 21, 2024). Ben believes hazing exists on his campus on a spectrum. On Ben’s campus, any student group that has a new member process has to sign the anti-hazing agreements, showing they have read the policy, understand the policy, and they agree to abide by the policy. When discussing hazing with the students, they believe hazing is physical abuse or alcohol abuse, but they do not connect it to some of the smaller hazing activities happening in their chapter.

The warning signs of hazing come from professor reports that students are missing class more, are visibly tired, or are disengaged. Students might be dressed in a suit and tie on a random Tuesday. Sometimes the student will have a change in demeanor or even their voice has changed. In conversations, the students will talk about the new members coming back to the fraternity house after the party to clean, or they are given the job of sober monitors at the

event. You do not see that as much on the sorority side because they do not have house parties. Sorority hazing tends to be more subtle. As an example, Ben talks about the sorority new members having to be at every single event, but initiated members do not necessarily have to be at every event. There are certain expectations on how sorority members should carry themselves.

The big difference that Ben sees with multicultural organizations, or the traditionally black fraternities and sororities, are the advisors, in that the advisor believes the activities in question are an expectation of membership, and the advisors are pushing that expectation on the undergraduate chapter. That becomes difficult for a college student to say no to an advisor who is 30 or 40 years old because of the power dynamics that are in play. Campuses need to get the alumni on board with the anti-hazing efforts, and then in turn, the administration can get the students on board with the anti-hazing efforts.

Ben brought up the importance of trust in his work, because he knows how to have conversations with students when a hazing report comes to his office. Ben felt that students need to believe that administrators are looking out for their best interests. Ben likes to talk about the membership experience as a whole, what is brotherhood and sisterhood, how students can build community, and how students can focus on recruitment and retention. One way to approach this with a student is to explain that if the chapter gets a reputation on campus that they do not treat the new members well, then that will start to impact the chapter's ability to recruit, and also the types of people that the chapter is able to recruit. The best students on campus will not want to join this student organization because the student does not believe they will have a good experience.

If you use the term hazing, Ben feels that students can go into panic or survival mode. “Students don’t necessarily think about the smaller scale stuff that can snowball or have unintended consequences that are not immediately visible” (Ben, personal communication, October 21, 2024). However, Ben believes if a student’s safety is in danger, then you need immediate intervention.

The members also believe that the membership experience should be meaningful. In Ben’s view, students will default to hazing because they see it as something difficult to overcome, which then makes it a meaningful experience. What could be a replacement activity that the students believe is adequate in place of hazing? Ben believes that student affairs professionals need to show students ways to make it meaningful and accomplish the same thing, just through different means.

### **Participant 3: Chad**

Chad has been working at his public institution in the Northeast for less than a year, he has membership in an IFC organization, and he advises 4 councils. In total, he has 9 years of experience advising fraternities and sororities. Chad describes hazing as the power imbalance that puts student’s safety at risk, including their emotional, physical, and mental well-being. Students feel that everything is hazing on his campus, “so they either lean into the bucket of we can’t do anything, or they learn into the bucket of keeping it super-secret” (Chad, personal communication, October 23, 2024). He acknowledges that there is hazing on campus that is unreported or is a part of the campus culture itself. Chad clarified that in his state, lawmakers

elevated hazing from a misdemeanor to a felony, and that came about from lobbying and petitioning from the Piazza family after losing their son, Timothy Piazza.

In order to educate students, there has been education for new members prior to joining a Fraternity or Sorority. This consists of recorded videos or in-person education, conversations around the content, and then a quiz at the end to demonstrate that learning has occurred. This can feel like student affairs professionals are checking a box each year, and Chad is not satisfied because campuses have not eradicated hazing yet. As the Fraternity and Sorority Life professional, Chad gets tapped as the hazing expert, including other areas on campus such as athletics. Chad does try to include other campus partners to be part of that conversation on signs, symptoms, and addressing hazing behaviors, but he feels other partners on campus do not take an active role in prevention.

Some of the signs of hazing include students seeming extra tired, their apparel has changed, personality changes, or appearance changes. Chad feels student affairs professionals should question these behaviors. Chad will have one-on-one conversations with the new member educators and ask about what their big-little night looks like. For fraternities, hazing will typically be forced alcohol consumption, personal servitude, and calisthenics. Chad also brought up instances where hazing intersects with Title IX issues by reminding the students that they “asked the new members to drop their pants as part of that process, right? We’re talking about Title IX” (Chad, personal communication, October 23, 2024).

Chad explained the difference between bullying versus hazing by saying that bullying is exclusive and students don’t want you to be part of their group, where hazing is that students

want you to be part of their group so they put you through this ordeal. For sororities, there are bullying and hazing pieces, but also “mean girl” behaviors. Essentially, women will treat students differently because of how they feel about that student or because of who the student’s big sister in the sorority is, or who the student is with romantically. In historically black fraternities and sororities, there is a distinction between a paper process and a made process depending on how difficult the new member process was. There is a need for students to prove themselves and earn the letters in order to be a true member, which in turn gets the respect of the older members in the chapter. Within the Latin organizations or Asian Pacific Islander groups, the students tend to disappear for the semester (physically and online), and then there is a big reveal at a probate or new member presentation as a new identity.

In terms of interventions, every case or scenario looks differently. If Chad hears rumors, then he will have a conversation with a student to understand where the rumor is coming from. The university will investigate every hazing report that comes in. Chad makes it clear that the easiest thing to do would be to remove the recognition of an organization, but it takes more work to actually solve the problem and restore the justice that was undone. Chad wants to work through the lower levels of hazing and power dynamics while putting chapters on a restoration plan, instead of removing recognition, having your organization go underground, and continue operating in a worse manner.

In the past, Chad was seen as the hazing prevention expert on campus. There was a hazing prevention committee that was made up of people from the wellness center, student conduct, athletics, and campus recreation to address hazing concerns and be proactive. At his current institution, hazing prevention is not seen as a priority because the campus does not

have the capacity to do so. Chad has interactions with students more often, is attuned to what is happening in the news, and is more likely to hear about hazing activity. From a proactive hazing prevention approach, Fraternity and Sorority Life is the only department on campus talking about it. Educational programming should not just happen during National Hazing Prevention Week. Chad feels that student affairs professionals need to get out of the office, experience the students where they are, and see what those power dynamics look like. Chad fosters good relationships with the chapter advisors in order to fully utilize those resources and be sure the advisors want to address things, know what to look for, and know how to address things.

Chad believes that higher education is not the best place to address hazing. He feels that national organizations are choosing to lobby and are making more movement happen, including ensuring that the right laws are in place. However, when the police are not convicting in these cases, the laws do not make a difference. In terms of accountability, Chad sees it being done more using an organizational lens, less so on an individual lens. Chad stressed the importance of educating himself on the practices of other councils, being a better professional, and understanding that it is his responsibility to get that education, not someone else's responsibility to teach him.

#### **Participant 4: Debbie**

Debbie has been working at her public institution in the Northeast for well over 10 years. She is affiliated with a Panhellenic organization, and she advises 2 councils on campus. Debbie defines hazing as trying to gain membership or maintain membership in an organization

and being subjected to any type of physical, emotional, or psychological harm in order to be a part of that organization. Debbie also makes the distinction that permission or consent to participate by the potential candidate cannot be used as a defense for hazing. Sometimes the students misunderstand hazing, or students think that everything is hazing. Debbie underscores that hazing looked very different 25 years ago than it does today. She sees new members dressing a certain way or engaging in personal servitude, even head shaving. Since the university has not done a climate assessment in a long time, it is hard to tell exactly what is going on. The university does have a strong policy and a strong anti-hazing stance on campus.

For any type of hazing allegation for any organization on campus, university police will handle the investigation. The university police are trained well, they take it seriously and know how to get information. There is a group called the Group Review and Referral Committee, and that includes Vice Presidents for Standards, University Police Investigators, the Director of Student Conduct, someone from Student Activities, and an Assistant Athletic Director. The Assistant Athletic Director has since stopped coming to the meetings. This group will figure out what to do with this information, figure out what is going on, and come up with a solution. After investigation, the case could go through a student conduct process, a council standards process, or go back to the Fraternity and Sorority Advisor for a conversation with the students.

In terms of hazing prevention education, Fraternity and Sorority Life does much more education, and the athletic department does minimal education. Typically, the university depends on coaches to prevent it from happening, but the coaches are not there all the time, and there is no education on what hazing is, why they should not engage in the activity, and typical consequences. For other clubs and organizations on campus, it is usually a five minute

conversation because the university does not have a long history of problems in student clubs and organizations. As an institution, when a major hazing incident happens, then the upper level administration feels the need to do something. “You’ll have an incident. There will be a committee. There will be some work done. We’ll do some common learning outcomes and some education. And then, 5 years later, it’s gone away because there wasn’t enough support from the upper administration to continue the momentum with that” (Debbie, personal conversation, October 24, 2024).

These activities come to light on social media where students will post things that they think are funny, other students will start to comment, and then someone reports it. The university also has a hazing hotline and an online incident report. Debbie feels that sometimes it is difficult to see because universities have driven the behavior underground. On other campuses, administrators or students might see the new members dressed alike in the dining hall, or members being interviewed in the residence hall lounges. Another sign of hazing is when new members have been gone for days, nobody on campus has seen these new members, or new members are not talking to their parents. Students will see abnormal behavior and they report it.

Debbie believes that fraternity hazing is definitely more physical than the sororities. For the fraternities, it might mean putting new members in dark rooms, playing the music super loud, turning the heat up, and having the new members drink Nyquil. Sororities are using more mean spirited types of things, including mind games. “Sororities have silly tasks such as separating the sprinkles into different colors, putting a blindfold on and making them smell a cup of bleach and telling them to drink it, but it is actually a cup of water. Fraternities are more

creative at torturing people, I guess” (Debbie, personal conversation, October 24, 2024). For culturally based groups on her campus, Debbie sees lots of secrecy behind the process itself. Members cannot tell the Fraternity/Sorority Advisor if they are a part of the organization, the student is missing in action for 3 or 4 weeks, and there is a general lack of transparency in the process because people on campus are not allowed to know that the new members are joining an organization.

Debbie has learned that the students have to own the problem and be a part of the solution if they want to change the behavior. Bringing students into that process as early as possible is really important. Find out what happened, what can be learned from this process, and how students can prevent it from happening again. When developing sanctions, take into account what the organization’s opinions are. “When students see that the outcome is to change the behavior, not shut the organization down, that has really changed the ability of the students to accept responsibility for things. In the past they would have gotten suspended, they would have their rights taken away, and that’s just not philosophically what we do. You can convince them there’s another way to accomplish what they want to accomplish. If you think that it’s okay to physically abuse people and torture people, there’s not a lot of rehabilitation that we’re going to be able to do with you, and in those cases those groups usually just get shut down” (Debbie, personal conversation, October 24, 2024).

Debbie reflected on her long career in Fraternity and Sorority Life. When she first started in the profession, she thought that she had to prevent it herself, and that if it happened, that it was her fault that she did not do something. Now Debbie sees herself as a facilitator. She cannot force students to do what they do not want to do, but she can give students tools and

other ways to do new member education. Debbie can teach them about the laws, policies, and consequences. Debbie can help them design better new member experiences. Debbie has conducted a New Member Education Institute in the past to talk about outcomes of the new member process and activities to get those outcomes. Debbie has created a New Member Education Showcase where students share their new member process with a panel of professionals and get feedback to make the process better. All of that is designed to change the hazing culture without actually telling students not to haze. Another piece is helping the students to understand the congruence between their organizational purpose and values, and how harming people is counterproductive to that. Debbie asks the students to reflect on why their organization exists. Debbie concluded by sharing that there is not enough research out there, there is not enough best practices, and it is not a priority for institutions until there is an injury, death, or bad publicity.

**Participant 5: Elisa**

Elisa has been working for her private institution in the South for over 7 years. She advises one council, and is affiliated with a multicultural sorority. Her definition of hazing includes activities that demean or belittle an individual, physical or mental, that can have a long term negative effect on the individual seeking to join or to have continued membership in an organization. She stressed the wide range of activities and the spectrum to hazing behaviors that can impact people around the member as well. Students might refer to it as fun activities that the students wanted to participate in because they feel it can bring a group together in some way, shape, or form. Elisa believes it is hard to define because each student has different limits, different ideas on what is unacceptable behavior, and different tolerances. The individual

that was hazed said, “The chapter took care of me, I didn’t feel like that was hazing”, while the individual was still processing what took place (Elisa, personal conversation, October 30, 2024).

The culture on Elisa’s campus is embedded immediately as soon as students step foot on campus, “we look out for one another, we take care of each other, this is a family environment, and if you see someone hurt you are going to get them help”. This includes medical amnesty policies in place on her campus. The thinking from the students when someone loses their life in a hazing incident is that it happened on other campuses. Students believe it would not happen here, the students would not take it that far. However, Elisa knows students who decided not to participate and have left the university because of the hazing activities. When reflecting on her conversation with one of these students, it was described to Elisa as “I can no longer remain here as a student. I’m not going to be welcomed. It’s just not going to be an okay space for me to stay here. I feel pressured that if I drop or if I leave, my life will not be good” (Elisa, personal conversation, October 30, 2024).

The student rights and responsibilities handbook contains a definition of hazing, and consent does not exclude students from being held accountable for any hazing activities. The university holds new member symposiums for new members, administrators review the policies with chapter leaders at the start of each semester, and the campus even has a Director of Student Conduct acting as the IFC advisor on campus. While some see that as a conflict of interest, the administrators see it as building a different layer of rapport with the students to help unlock knowledge and understanding of their policies. There is also a website that allows for people in their community to report hazing activities anonymously. The biggest issue with the website is the lack of sufficient details because the person submitting the information does

not want to name the organization involved. Even parents are limited in what they can share because they do not want to lose the trust of the student who has shared information with them. Parents have contacted Elisa and want her to look into things because it is beyond the 8 week mark of the new member process. Parents are concerned that the student should have been initiated already.

The IFC fraternities on campus have been on campus a long time, and the chapters still distinguish new members with a pledge tie in order to identify new members with a more professional look. "Sometimes our men pull out a pair of slacks and a white shirt out of a bag that's been sitting there all week until the next week, and it's wrinkled, I don't know that it's professional. Our men tend to sometimes interrupt class and bring gifts to women in Panhellenic like a Starbucks coffee. The professors were getting very annoyed with it because you are interrupting the learning environment, and we had to put a halt to that". Cleaning fraternity houses on rotations, even if that is an off campus house, was learned through an investigation as hazing activity is present in their community. Students also like to involve alcohol in the new member process. "Go purchase random items in the middle of the night for them, report back to the house, cleaning, a little more servitude". Elisa recognized a strong bond when it comes to brotherhood. While students did not know much about what the organization really is about, what is the organization's ritual, the founding date, or who the organization's founders are, the students do have a very tight knit group. When talking more about this bond, fraternity members have said "it has a lot of meaning to me. I immediately knew this was the right place for me, I have shared some of my most intimate secrets or thoughts with them, and that has bonded me to them" (Elisa, personal conversation, October

30, 2024). This is the struggle for Elisa, as chapters clearly know how to build brotherhood and friendships, but chapters are losing sight of the values, the history, and why the organization exists.

When discussing the hazing from a Panhellenic perspective, Elisa described it as “Sometimes there’s a little more of the sorority influence for the men to bring coffee to the sorority member. It’s actually coming from her big in the sorority, but the male pledge in the fraternity has to go do it. It causes classroom interruptions and disturbances, as well as unwanted attention that says you’re just here to play during the class day to negatively impact the learning environment”. One sorority on campus was closed after a big-little reveal event where sororities have played with the line of hazing in family structures with their own local ceremony, but it was not consistent with how the National Headquarters expected the ceremony to be done. The activity included fraternity men, blindfolds, and students getting into cars with unknown individuals. When students got an answer wrong to a guessing game, they had to drink alcohol from a bottle and eventually students were intoxicated. “I would never get in a car with an unknown individual while blindfolded, not knowing what is happening around me or who may be touching me”. In that instance, members of the organization were not happy with what was happening and it was their own members who reported the incident. These members understood that the activity was not right, but also these students were leaders on campus in a much bigger capacity beyond just Greek Life, so these students were concerned that consequences would fall back on them as well. While Panhellenic likes to involve men from fraternities in these activities, this can be very uncomfortable for a female freshman student who does not know anyone on campus, and is just going along with what is

being asked of this student in order to belong to a group. The person who reported it said, “I would have been triggered by what was happening if I had been the person blindfolded” (Elisa, personal conversation, October 30, 2024).

In NPHC councils, Elisa questions the information that is being shared during public presentations because it must have taken a long time to learn, and Elisa questions the purpose behind it. “The depth of the knowledge of information they have memorized is always a bit of a shocker. I know these organizations are so large, and they can recite every chapter in the state. Where is the emphasis of what’s important in joining your organization? The shaving of the heads, even though they claim it’s done after the new member process is over for the presentation, it is still a challenge for me to accept that someone would want to shave their entire head”. Elisa understood that this was a show of public display that the student has earned their way into the organization. “They’re always trying to one up each other in a semester, we have to look like we had a harder process. It’s a toughness mentality”. For the younger organizations in MGC, “it’s a lot harder for us younger organizations. To see that change happen and transition out when the members who created our process are around and still alive” (Elisa, personal conversation, October 30, 2024).

Some of the frustration came out when discussing intervention. “It is hard, especially as an office that does not have dedicated staff hired just to work with fraternities and sororities. I myself am not a full time Fraternity and Sorority staff member, so intervention can look very different. We’ve received tips, anonymous messages, and emails. I’ve received door notes slid under my door. Parent phone calls. Headquarters get a phone call to their national hotline. I will say that we work together well with headquarters. I think there’s a lot of room for

improvement on how we intervene. At a different campus, we just went in and would try to interview almost everyone. Here, it's almost the complete opposite. If you ask someone did you do this bad thing, the response is I did not do this bad thing. I don't think it should end there. We are so understaffed. It could work that they are halting the behavior, or they are just getting better at hiding it" (Elisa, personal conversation, October 30, 2024).

Overall, Elisa understands that there is no room for hazing in organizations if students want to build lifelong memberships and positive experiences. When students are mistreated, these students want nothing to do with the organization and the people that hate them, so these students remove themselves from the experience. The administration needs these members to run the organization and continue operating them in order to keep the organizations thriving. "It hinders the prosperity of our organizations" (Elisa, personal conversation, October 30, 2024).

The lessons learned by Elisa over the years is to not be afraid to ask questions with culturally-based groups. Talk to the students about their experiences, even if students emphasize that the process is confidential to the members in those organizations. Elisa stresses that student affairs professionals should go to chapter meetings. Student affairs professionals should hold new member symposium retreats. Elisa acknowledges that new students are added every semester to the community. Elisa feels there are layers to what her community needs. However, she does not feel that Greek Life is a community where professionals want to build their career, invest in it, and develop the students in order for the community to thrive. "Everybody's like, fix Greek Life. Where's the big band aid that's going to fix them? That's going

to make them just do right all the time, 24 by 7?" (Elisa, personal conversation, October 30, 2024).

A warning sign that Elisa talked about is when a student joins the organization and then half of that membership line is inactive, or the student experiences a significant drop in grades. Students have personal cultural experiences that they bring to a college campus, and these students want a family environment of support, which is what fraternities and sororities say they create. "Sometimes the Fraternity and Sorority community does the exact opposite during the New Member Education process and try to weed them out in an attempt to showcase their loyalty to the organization. That's a disservice to them. It's a disservice to their academics. It's a disservice to why we exist" (Elisa, personal conversation, October 30, 2024).

Elisa has seen a different investment in Greek Life now than there was years ago, mostly because of the losses seen in Greek Life. "That community gets 2 new staff members, 4 new staff members, they hire a consulting firm that revamps how that community is operating. Why is there a community of 7,000 people operating with only 2 or 3 staff members running it? It could be close to something like athletics. Athletes have coaches and coordinators for all levels. People that support nutrition. People that support their academics. People that support their specialty or their position. Greek Life is just as impactful on campus, and they are given 1 staff member or 2 staff members. It's so hard to invest in those staff members and not burn them out" (Elisa, personal conversation, October 30, 2024).

Despite her frustrations, Elisa underscored that Greek Life is an experience that builds loyalty to the university, the students want to come back, and the students want to give back to

the institution because they remember the experience they had. Which is why the topic of hazing needs continued research in Elisa's mind.

### **Participant 6: Fiona**

Fiona has been employed for less than one year at her public institution in the South, but she has been advising Fraternities and Sororities for almost 6 years total. She is affiliated with a Panhellenic organization, and she currently advises two councils on campus. Her definition of hazing is anything that humiliates, degrades or inflicts physical/mental harm on an individual attempting to join or maintain their membership. This is usually tied to Greek letter organizations. Within the first 14 days of Fiona working at her current institution, there was a hazing allegation. The current laws in the state require in-person education, as well as publishing conduct violations for anyone who has been found responsible of hazing. Fiona acknowledges that hazing prevention is done differently from campus to campus.

Some of the signs of hazing that Fiona has seen includes new members all dressed the same, new members carrying cleaning supplies, or carrying an object. Another sign is a depressed posture from the new members, or looking a little disheveled. "Depression is what I've seen, there's a heaviness that there seems to be a lot going on for that student. I had one student come in and report that a friend was being hazed, but it was actually the student that was reporting". Fiona sees the hazing a form of bonding, education, and respect to the organization. This includes those students who have come before them, as well as to the current membership. When asked why the hazing occurs, students will say "we've just always

done this, and we're just going to continue" even though the students don't know why (Fiona, personal conversation, October 30, 2024).

As for the differences between organizations, Fiona sees shame and humiliation in the women's organizations, including putting women on washing machines. A recent incident included showing images to see if there was any form of arousal, and not moving forward with this new member if there was arousal. Typically, women were cleaning houses as well. For the men's organizations, Fiona has seen more physical hazing activities including pushups on glass or some kind of broken materials, drinking gross things, or paddling. In historically black fraternities and sororities, it has also been more physical hazing including paddling.

When Fiona and I discussed interventions, Fiona stressed the importance of catching hazing activities early because the activities will escalate over time. Making the new members serve as designated drivers, running errands, or using the new member's money to buy things for others might seem benign, but it can spiral out of control if left unchecked. Fiona's opinions have changed around hazing over time. When Fiona first started in the profession, she wanted to completely eradicate hazing and had a zero tolerance stance. When Fiona went to a presentation at the Association of Fraternity/Sorority Advisors Annual Meeting with Aldo Cimino, she understood that hazing is not going away and the behavior goes back thousands of years. The behavior is tied to the rights of passage and the deeper cultural things to prove oneself. Fiona referenced how hazing is embedded within the culture when she remembered seeing a Dunkin Donuts commercial where a senior staff member was scolding a new staff member for not remembering a coffee order. Today, Fiona believes in building scaffolding around the new member experience to be sure student affairs professionals are providing

education, training, and support to the students with the least amount of harm tied to it because hazing is not going away. Fiona recalled a senior administrator on campus who felt that by saying students should not haze, students should then follow instructions, but Fiona had to explain that it does not work that way.

When pushed further, Fiona used examples such as very well-known campuses that have every resource and hazing prevention centers at their disposal, and these campuses still have hazing activity. “There’s a real darkness that you could go down with this. It doesn’t matter, no matter what we do. We could have all the things and it still can happen. You try to keep a positive mindset. Why is this work important? What are the positive moments where change has happened? It’s still heartbreaking. I think we may have slowed a little bit, but once a year is still too much”. Fiona feels that awareness on the topic of hazing has increased and there is additional support available. She compares hazing prevention work to a hurricane, in that it needs to be intense, forceful, and consistent. Fiona felt that the work can be exhausting but student affairs professionals cannot let up. The minute you think that everything is good, that is precisely when you are sunk in Fiona’s opinion. In terms of hazing prevention education, Fiona thinks about the backside of the educational programming in order to continue the education. While she wants to be compliant with the law, she really wants to bring culture change. This could be chapter coaching sessions where real change can be made. While some Fraternity and Sorority Advisors might be meeting with the chapter president, that chapter president might not be bringing those lessons back to the chapter. Student Affairs Professionals need to meet with new member educators, recruitment chairmen, and additional officers. “Good luck if you’re a Fraternity and Sorority Advisor of one. You’ve got FSAs that are carrying

the entirety on their own. They are under-resourced. This is the hardest functional area in Student Affairs. It is the scariest. Students are truly making life and death decisions every weekend” (Fiona, personal communication, October 30, 2024).

Fiona continued to stress the importance of resources and education. “We’re not teaching it in Grad School about how to deal with all the things that can happen. It’s really scary. Are we making inroads? Yes. There’s a lot that has to happen in the day to day in order for real change to occur. If the resources are non-existent? There’s so much more that’s happening for a FSA than just hazing prevention work. I’ve tried to help campuses understand that this is not just a Fraternity and Sorority Life thing. We can execute it and bring everybody to the table and all those things. It’s not just us. It is club sports and athletics, so this cannot be an FSL thing. So, good luck if you’re a campus that doesn’t have hazing prevention or preventative services on campus” (Fiona, personal communication, October 30, 2024).

### **Participant 7: Gary**

Gary works for a private institution in the Midwest. He has been working there for three years but has thirteen years of experience advising Fraternities and Sororities in total. Gary is affiliated with an IFC organization, and currently is advising 4 councils on campus. Gary defines hazing as anything that causes mental, physical, or emotional harm in the process of joining a group. The community typically has one or two hazing investigations per year, but it is usually smaller behaviors that students tend to put up with or may not define as hazing. “Most people don’t report out or don’t feel that it has happened to them, so they have not need to report it

out” (Gary, personal conversation, November 7, 2023). Gary makes it clear that the state has anti-hazing laws and the campus is operating under a zero tolerance policy.

For hazing prevention initiatives, Gary ensures that students use a new member onboarding experience called Greek 101. The module talks about hazing, what it means, how to identify if the student is being hazed, alcohol usage, Title IX, and finding resources at the university. Before chapters start the new member process, student leaders meet with the Fraternity/Sorority Life office to go over new member expectations and the weekly schedules with the new members. The NPHC and MGC organizations have national level oversight of the new member process, so the advisors meet with the Fraternity/Sorority Life office before starting a new member process.

Gary can see hazing on campus when student behaviors start to change. Students can become withdrawn, their sleeping patterns have changed, or students start to say something about the process but then stop because students are unsure if they should be talking about it or not. Rumors of hazing can persist in certain chapters, so Gary will ask follow up questions in one-on-one meetings to see if any of those behaviors are actually starting. Typically, hazing on his campus involve sleep deprivation and requiring new members to clean the house. “The more they try to hide it, the more it stands out” (Gary, personal conversation, November 7, 2024).

In terms of differences between fraternities and sororities, Gary sees more physical hazing activities in fraternities. Alcohol is also a major component in fraternity hazing. With the sororities, Gary sees more emotional and mental hazing. “More pointing out issues with their

bodies. It's more mean girls type behavior, your outfit is so last year, and comments of that nature that slowly tears someone down" (Gary, personal conversation, November 7, 2024).

Within the traditionally black fraternities and sororities, Gary sees hazing in a historical context, where hazing was about toughening up members to approach racism in the country during the early 1900's. Now those behaviors continue and persist today. This could be shouting at new members, making degrading comments, but definitely still physical things as well. In the multicultural groups, the new member process is typically shorter, and sometimes hazing will occur before students are even defined as a new member of the organization. In one situation on campus, an interested sorority member was forced to plank while an active member stood over her shouting obscenities. "What tends to persist in these communities stem from that cultural aspect of being prepared to face people that are going to treat you as lesser than in society" (Gary, personal conversation, November 7, 2024).

There are intervention points such as a student coming forward with their own personal hazing story, a chapter leader coming forward to talk about hazing in their organization, a police report, or a tip coming through an anonymous tip line. Gary likes a police report because now there is a witness, whereas anonymous reports are typically hearsay. With anonymous reports, all student affairs professionals can do is watch, observe, and hope that someone else comes forward. Gary helps the chapters understand what hazing actually is versus what they see in the news or movies. Many students think that the behavior is normal if they experienced hazing in sports teams while in high school, so students are accustomed to that behavior, even though it is not actually supposed to be happening. Gary works with chapter leaders to create a more positive interface into their organization.

There have been lessons that Gary has learned over the years, including always asking the follow up questions when something does not feel right. Gary also feels that universities cannot eliminate all hazing behaviors because they are human behaviors, and the topic of hazing is much larger than just college fraternities or college organizations. Therefore, Gary provides examples and structures for students whenever they are confronting or changing behaviors. Gary frames it as learning or developing a skill. He likes activities to involve the full chapter so that everyone is held to the same standard, including GPA, study hours, or cleaning schedules across the entire chapter. Instead of lineups and asking stressful or embarrassing questions of the new members, Gary prefers written tests to remove stress.

**Participant 8: Henry**

Henry has worked for his public institution in the West for the last 8 years, and had 6 years of experience working with Fraternities and Sororities before that. Henry is affiliated with an MGC organization, and he is currently advising 3 councils. Henry's definition of hazing is anything that causes harm as a component of their members in an organization, including physical, psychological, or emotional harm. Henry sees the impact of hazing on his campus because a student died on his campus a few years ago as a result of hazing. The students worry about what hazing is, what it looks like, and how students can avoid it.

Hazing is reported directly to the Fraternity and Sorority Life office through conduct reports. There is a robust advising model in Henry's department where chapters are called in to meet, engage, participate, and ask questions regularly. The campus works with a large research group to be sure the campus is adopting best practices for hazing prevention, education, and

intervention work. Students will typically participate in a hazing prevention module online that is customized for state laws and customized to their specific campus community. Students can then define and identify hazing in their community quickly, and students will then engage with reporting at the end of their recruitment process. As students go through the process, the staff will define what a healthy new process looks like so the new members understand what they should be expecting. It has been called a New Member Bill of Rights or New Member Expectations, allowing students to build a dream new member experience. Typically, the staff will have at least four interactions with the students before initiation.

Interaction from the Fraternity and Sorority Life office does not stop after initiation. The staff will also do training if students want to be a big brother or big sister in the organization to help the students understand what that mentor relationship should look like. Henry points out that if you yourself did not have a great mentor, then it is hard to model good behavior. Henry focused on creating trust and connection in the new member process. Henry's office will also hold Executive Board training on how to identify hazing, how to intervene, as well as obligations on reporting according to state law. Reports of hazing are mandated to be reported to the university, and that includes all university employees, including student employees or volunteers. So, typically students will move up to the 80<sup>th</sup> percentile in saying that they understand hazing and when they should report, but Henry wonders how the administration can actually facilitate behavioral change.

Henry sees hazing activity on his campus such as forced alcohol consumption, degradation, and forcing students to do chores. Chapters are asked to meet with a department liaison advisor monthly, so that typically works out to be 7 or 8 times a year based on the

academic calendar. In those meetings, advisors will ask about the new member process, organizational values, and whether the chapter is actually following what the national organization or alumni boards are expecting. Advisors will ask questions to understand what the new members are learning in each step of the process to pick up on any institutional policy violations. As an example, the new member process is limited to 8 weeks for all organizations, so anything beyond that would be a violation.

In Henry's state, everybody is a mandated reporter, so they receive direct training. When meeting with students, student affairs professionals explain that before sharing any specifics about the new member process, professionals are obligated to report the behavior to student conduct if the behavior violates their hazing policies. Clearly the students are talking to administration or staff because students need help, but going straight to student conduct will result in a full investigation, which would reduce reporting. With the fraternities on campus:

We're seeing more physically violent behaviors, such as, you have to go get into a fight with somebody to protect our chapter, or, don't fuck your brothers. There is a need to make sure you are protecting each other no matter what. IFC fraternities will protect that organization and the information that could be damning to that organization at any cost. It is inherent masculinity playing itself out there in the form of dominance based roles. Folks need to establish themselves as stronger and more powerful. One of the chapter presidents said I'm in my role because the chapter fears me.

According to Henry, there are big open fields near campus, and there are rumors of organizations taking their new members and dropping them off in the fields, requiring the new members to find their way home.

When you try to address that with a chapter, the level of absolute denial is remarkable. Everybody has the exact same line to tow there, or we have practiced and trained ourselves on how exactly we want to respond to that (Henry, personal conversation, November 7, 2024).

In the sororities on campus, Henry sees shame being applied to the students. Sorority new members were dressed in trash bags and then brought around to different fraternities. The fraternities threw eggs at the new members, creating shame in those new members. Students are trying to establish hierarchy and commitment to the organization. There are similar behaviors between fraternities and sororities around forced alcohol consumption. Henry explained that he had seen a video of a sorority woman telling her little sister in the sorority to drink a fifth of vodka funnel style, which Henry would expect from the fraternity side. The fact that this high level hazing activity existed on the sorority side was jarring, abnormal, and also concerning for Henry.

In the culturally based organizations on campus, Henry saw submissive hazing behavior. As an example, new members would refer to Henry and other administrators as “yes, sir” or “yes, ma’am” when they meet with them on campus, and the students stressed that it was part of their organizational culture and they show reverence in that way even though it was not required by the administration. “It is a dependency model. I only exist because my big brother

or my mentor in the chapter allowed me to exist in this organization. That relationship that is built there seems really unique". The new member will also engage with the campus community differently.

Their first semester, they tend to be pretty quiet, not well connected or engaged across the community. Then in the second semester, you see behavior at a yard show or new member presentation, they look to that big brother or mentor for information or how to behave. What's okay to say, what's not okay to say. There is a clear hierarchy that exists there. We do still see the high level of secrecy, and we must protect the chapter at all costs (Henry, personal conversation, November 7, 2024).

As for lessons learned, Henry believes student affairs professionals should intervene as early as possible, before it becomes a problem. Henry felt it is easier to help a student pass a class when they have missed one homework assignment than when they missed ten. Henry believes the same thing holds true in hazing prevention. Hazing will be reported to student conduct for intervention, which could include interim sanctions and suspension of chapters. Henry makes sure that chapters have the resources they need to make improvements. However, because of the mandated reporting in the state, students have a difficult time understanding how to talk to the administration so that they can help with early intervention, as Henry discussed:

Folks who do not have that statutory responsibility to report will engage with the chapter. We have worked to contract with well recognized hazing prevention experts external to the university to work with chapters. They come in, talk candidly with the

chapters about the specific behaviors, help them prepare, respond, adjust, and adapt. They have intervention conversations where students can be honest. I actually think it's more valuable that we're able to engage with people external to the university for that, because it provides the students an even safer place. When the contract ends, it goes away with them. And that's great. Something that you tell our department goes into your chapter notes and it becomes a part of your chapter's history for the next 5 years. So, to some degree, I actually think it is an intervention style that can be really, really helpful on the preemptive side. I don't know whether or not it's impactful. It is one of those pieces of data that I can't measure because of the way that our systems are set up, and good or bad, it's what it is. (Henry, personal conversation, November 7, 2024)

This led to a conversation with Henry on the effectiveness of the state laws and Henry's feelings about mandatory reporting:

Before our state laws changed, we were engaging in prevention education conversations about what was happening in our new member processes very directly. That has in a lot of ways tied our hands in a way that has pushed the behavior further out to the periphery for departments like mine. I understand why mandated reporting exists. Very honestly and frankly, I believe in it. It also feels underhanded, you can't talk to me, but we'll have this person on contract to you. It's sly and it's navigating the system in the way that the system was built. There's a moment where it doesn't feel good. (Henry, personal conversation, November 7, 2024)

One of the areas that Henry is working on within the institution is that hazing is not just a Fraternity and Sorority Life problem, it is bigger than that. Henry sees new hazing trends among the chapters that he is paying attention to, and then figuring out what his office needs to do from an educational standpoint to adapt. Henry is also measuring their institutional efficacy in their interventions and educational programming:

We are balancing our legal obligation to provide training with our moral obligation to effectively train and educate, but trying to do more effective training may not be a fiscal possibility at this time. The work is never done. There's always opportunity to do more and do better. As soon as you feel like you've gotten a system or project or process or intervention model that is really working, something will happen in the next 6 months or a year that will derail that. It feels like it devalues the work that we've already accomplished because what I was doing 8 years ago is not effective anymore. Our students changed and they grew up, and that didn't work anymore. (Henry, personal conversation, November 7, 2024)

Henry was critical of how administrators react to hazing in higher education, as well as where university responsibilities should start and end:

Institutions seem to only want to deal with hazing when it's a problem, and the reason it becomes a problem is because you didn't deal with it. Institutions will wait until we're at the fire alarm going off before we will start working on that. The lack of literature in the field of hazing prevention contributes to that because there's not a ton out there that I can send to institutional leadership that shows that there's early intervention

techniques that are efficacious. We don't know whether or not it works and you'll never know unless you try. Because institutions want to protect themselves, there's a lot of case law out there around where the line of duty of care for institutions ends and where responsibility of our organizations starts. Are we starting to create duties of care that are beyond what institutions can, could, and should take on? (Henry, personal conversation, November 7, 2024)

Henry also looked at the headquarters of fraternity and sorority chapters. Henry wonders what is the responsibility of the national headquarters? Henry is aware of institutions that have hazing prevention coordinators, and he knows that all of the national organizations stand up against hazing, but he was not sure if he has ever met a hazing prevention coordinator for any of these headquarters. Henry felt that ownership is completely on the institutions for this. While he recognized that institutions need to be more transparent about the hazing that's happening on campuses, Henry felt that it lacks any transparency around those national organizations being transparent about the hazing that's happening in their organizations. "I think there's a hesitancy on that, because perhaps there's some bad players. Our organizations are afraid of being identified as bad players" (Henry, personal conversation, November 7, 2024).

The last part of the conversation with Henry was around data. Henry pointed out that Fraternity and Sorority Life does not build data systems. The industry is unable to track organization membership, either at the campus level or the national level, in any meaningful way. Henry believes that it is a problem when a chapter can drop a member for hazing and the same member can go join another chapter. Henry believes that industries as big as Fraternity

and Sorority Life nationally should build a data system to track who members are and what members do.

**Participant 9: Ian**

Ian has been working for his public institution in the West for over 10 years, and for 9 of those years, he has been an advisor for Fraternity and Sorority Life. He currently advises all 4 councils on campus, and Ian is a member of an IFC Fraternity. His definition of hazing is centered on the power dynamic that exists between students that are part of a group that could cause physical, emotional, or psychological harm. Ian added that students could agree to things that they may otherwise not agree with, usually when an individual wants to join an organization. When asked if there was hazing on his campus, Ian responded “We had a group just join my campus, and one of the reasons they started is because they wanted to be the non-hazing fraternity on campus. This says to me that there are other groups that are hazing” (Ian, personal conversation, November 18, 2024).

Ian has social risk management training every semester, and student affairs professionals will talk about hazing, definitions, examples, and share types of hazing gathered through the conduct process because the incidents occurred at their campus. The campus sponsors a National Hazing Prevention Week in the fall semester. The campus has a Hazing Prevention Collaborative that meets monthly to look at policies, procedures, resources, education, and prevention. Administrators are currently meeting in the policy and procedure group because they do not currently have a hazing policy on campus. While the state requires education and reporting of incidents associated with Fraternities and Sororities on campus,

there is only one line in the student code of conduct that defines hazing and states that students can face consequences if they engage in it. Ian's campus is not a policy-rich environment, so Ian is lobbying and advocating for an actual policy with consequences for the behavior. Even the definition in the student code of conduct is lacking a bit in Ian's view.

The signs of hazing can show up in various ways, including groups of individuals breaking into a property and having something stolen between fraternities. The fraternity will catch students in their space and will identify them as new members based on similar clothing (pants, shirt, and tie). Students will then figure out which organization they're associated with. There is a wide spectrum of hazing, ranging from picking up food for the active members all the way up to consumption of large amounts of alcohol. Terminology used for hazing activity could be new member activities, pledge activities, lists of activities for pledges to complete, scavenger hunts, brotherhood retreats, initiation week, the new members are staying at the house, or the new members are spending the night at the house.

In terms of differences between fraternities and sororities, Ian sees hazing happening in fraternities more often in frequency over sororities. There is a stronger chance that alcohol is involved in fraternities. The ability to have alcohol in a fraternity property makes it really easy to be in the new member process versus at a sorority property. Sorority members may have forced alcohol consumption as well at a social event, but with a fraternity, it is a more scheduled hazing activity. Sororities may be more big-little (relationship based) hazing versus the collective sorority activity as a whole. In fraternities, it is more of a collective chapter event. Sororities will look at the attractiveness of members in hazing behaviors, while fraternities look at hazing as activities around alcohol or "gross stuff". For the historically black fraternities and

sororities, Ian associates hazing with more physical hazing activities including paddling or branding. However, Ian makes it clear that he has not run into hazing incidents associated with the historically black fraternities and sororities.

When hazing cases emerge on campus, complaints will be registered with the Fraternity and Sorority Life office and then the case is sent to Student Conduct. Ian's office does not have the ability to investigate or adjudicate the claims. There will be a series of interviews with the new members, and Ian's staff in the Fraternity and Sorority Life office could be engaged in those interviews with Student Conduct. Ian later receives conduct reports associated with it. Ian then shares information with their headquarters. If there is a concern around harm to others or harm to self, then the university will typically issue an interim suspension to stop any new member activities. Just last semester, a fraternity was removed from campus for hazing.

Ian has had a handful of cases involving unrecognized fraternities on his campus. Ian will send them a notification letter talking about the violation, and he sends it to the chapter headquarters as well asking for the headquarters to be responsive to this issue. That violation notice will go in the chapter file on campus, this way when the chapter wants to return to campus, this violation while the group was unrecognized will be a factor in the university decision about returning to campus. Ian is able to use his relationship and influence to get headquarters staff to respond in these cases, and sometimes they are successful in their efforts. If the violation gets picked up in the local media, then Ian can use that media report as leverage in order to get the headquarters to be more responsive. The university student code of conduct does include individual student actions, but the challenge in this case is the unrecognized group action, not individual student actions. While the university does keep rosters for unrecognized

groups, the Student Conduct office has not necessarily pursued individual conduct charges associated with hazing in the past.

One of the things that has worked for Ian is finding a champion in the organization who is willing to stand up and say that the hazing behavior is not acceptable.

Helping them to develop a level of comfort, courage, and bravery around standing up to their brothers or sisters. To say, this is not acceptable to me, and I don't want this to happen in my organization. There is a bystander intervention piece here as well. Do the values of the fraternity or sorority truly mean something to them, and does it align with their values? What am I doing to develop that relationship with them, to support them, to empower them, to actually stand up and say this is not a part of the fraternity experience that I want to be a part of. I own the fraternity experience, and what you're doing is not a part of it. You're the one that needs to go, not me (Ian, personal communication, November 18, 2024).

When asked if higher education is making progress in the fight against hazing, Ian acknowledged that any progress is going to be incremental.

It has not gotten the attention, energy, time, and effort that alcohol has had over time, or that sexual violence has had over time, or drug use has over time. There has not been a coordinated effort around hazing prevention. Higher education inherits this from K through 12, because it is starting before they are coming to higher education. There is no information at the K through 12 level, explaining it, describing it, preventing it. There

has not been a comprehensive approach to hazing prevention at a college campus, or at least my college campus (Ian, personal communication, November 18, 2024).

Interestingly, Ian is seeing an uptick in hazing activities associated with registered student organizations. The university has addressed more hazing allegations over the last two years with other registered student organizations than they have with fraternities or sororities. These other registered student organizations get very limited information around hazing. “We’ve missed educating the general student population. Yet, the general student population is literally running their organizations themselves. We’ve seen it with some professional fraternities and we’ve seen it with some cultural and identity based organizations” (Ian, personal communication, November 18, 2024).

## **Themes**

This chapter presented the findings from interviews with nine student affairs professionals from public and private universities all over the United States. These findings highlighted three primary themes: Inconsistencies, Trust and Early Intervention, and Funding and Capacity Issues. In addition to these central themes, participants raised other points of discussion, including a changing of hazing activities on their campus over time, the dangers of lumping together hazing with hazardous drinking behaviors, the need for transparency in hazing cases at both the university level and the national fraternity level, student affairs professionals are feeling anxiety and stress over the dangerous hazing activities they are seeing, there is concern that the laws being created on hazing prevention are actually discouraging

students from reporting hazing activities, and more research is needed on hazing to share with the administration on campus.

### ***Theme 1: Inconsistencies***

The first theme, Inconsistencies, revealed that there is a lack of consistency in how universities define hazing in the United States. All of the student affairs professionals who were interviewed saw inconsistencies in this definition, as they each had slightly different definitions. Each state currently has a different hazing definition in the law (some states have no hazing law), each campus has a different definition of hazing in their student code of conduct, each national fraternity or sorority has a different definition in their bylaws, alumni have a wide range of definitions based on their college experiences, and students clearly have different definitions than administrators. Participants such as Adam talked about hazing cases in the media that were actually hazardous drinking events celebrating an invitation to join a fraternity that really do not meet the definition of hazing, and participants such as Elisa believe that hazing is hard to define because everyone has different limits, different ideas on what is unacceptable behavior, and what they can tolerate. The recent PledgeTok videos of new members dancing in front of sorority houses have reopened the debate on what is hazing because they view the activity as entertainment, so there is no victim in that case. Ian is currently lobbying and advocating on his campus to establish a hazing policy, as there is only a brief mention of the definition of hazing in their student code of conduct.

#### ***Sub-Theme 1: Hazing Activities Change***

Related to Inconsistencies with the definition was a sub-theme of hazing activities that are changing over time. Participant Adam discussed PledgeTok video trends with thousands of views on social media, as well as new members swiping meals on campus for members in the fraternity, both of which were viewed as a positive experience for the new member. Debbie has seen a big shift in hazing activities over her long career in Fraternity and Sorority Life including shaving heads and using Nyquil with the new members. Ella saw gifts being brought to classes from IFC fraternities to Panhellenic sororities causing disturbances in class. Fiona discussed images being shown to a new member and membership decisions were being made based on whether the new member was aroused in seeing that image. Henry was shocked to see women in a sorority have forced alcohol consumption activities, something he had believed was traditionally a men's hazing activity. Ian is seeing stealing items between fraternities as hazing activity.

### ***Sub-Theme 2: Inconsistency of Action and Values***

Another sub-theme was the Inconsistency of actions versus stated values. Ben talked about his discussions with students, making them realize that if new members are not having a good experience in the Fraternity or Sorority, then students will have a problem recruiting new members that share these values. Debbie is helping the students to understand the congruence between their organizational purpose and values, and how harming people is counterproductive to that. Elisa talked at length about students who decided not to participate in Fraternity and Sorority Life and have left the university because of the hazing activities. Elisa felt that organizations are doing a disservice to the students if organizations want to build lifelong memberships and positive experiences. When people are mistreated, they want

nothing to do with the organization and the people that hate them, so they remove themselves from the experience. Ian is finding champions with the courage to speak up within the organization in order to own the new member experience and the values that should be present in that experience.

### ***Sub-Theme 3: Inconsistencies in Hazing Prevention***

The last sub-theme under Inconsistencies was the inconsistencies in hazing prevention activities across campus, as well as reporting of hazing activities when looking at the universities versus the national organizations. Adam talked about universities disclosing every hazing case on their campus, but questioned why private organizations like national Fraternities and Sororities are not required to do the same. Chad felt that Fraternity and Sorority Life was the only department doing hazing prevention work on campus and feels other partners on campus do not take an active role. Fiona has tried to help campuses understand that hazing is not just a Fraternity and Sorority Life thing. Henry has contracted with well recognized hazing prevention experts external to the university to work with chapters outside of the state mandated reporting. Henry agrees that institutions need to be more transparent about the hazing that's happening on campuses, but also feels that it lacks any transparency around those national organizations being transparent about the hazing that's happening in their organizations. Ian stated that there has not been a comprehensive hazing prevention program on his campus.

## ***Theme 2: Trust and Early Intervention***

The next theme is the importance of building trust and early intervention in order to prevent serious hazing activity. Adam is regularly interfacing with new members on campus and has a hazing prevention task force is made up of students, faculty, staff, families of those impacted by hazing on their campus, as well as community members. Ben has a very close relationship with his students and stressed the importance of trust in his work, because he knows how to have conversations with students when a hazing report comes to his office. Chad makes it clear that the easiest thing to do would be to remove the recognition of an organization, but it takes more work to actually solve the problem and restore the justice that was undone. He puts chapters on a restoration plan, instead of removing recognition, having the organization go underground, and continue operating in a worse manner. Debbie talked about the importance of students seeing that the outcome is to change the behavior, not shut the organization down, which has changed the ability of the students to accept responsibility for their actions. Fiona is doing chapter coaching sessions where real change can be made. Gary is asking follow up questions when something does not feel right. Finally, Henry believes student affairs professionals should intervene as early as possible, before it becomes a problem, and made the comparison to helping students pass a class when they have missed one homework assignment versus missing ten assignments. Ian credits the trust that he has built with the fraternity and sorority headquarters in helping to resolve hazing cases on his campus.

### ***Theme 3: Funding and Capacity Issues***

The last theme is around Funding and Capacity Issues. Chad felt that hazing prevention is not seen as a priority at his current institution because they do not have the capacity to do

so. Debbie felt that there was not enough support from the upper administration to continue the momentum with prior hazing prevention initiatives on campus. Debbie also explained that hazing is not a priority for institutions until there is an injury, death, or bad publicity. Elisa pointed out the differences in staffing between the Fraternity and Sorority Life office and the Athletics department on her campus, and also said that she does not feel that Greek Life is a community where people want to build their career, invest in it, and develop the students in order for the community to thrive. Fiona was clear that Fraternity and Sorority Advisors are carrying the entirety on their own, they are under-resourced, and it is the hardest functional area in Student Affairs because students are making life and death decisions every weekend. Henry mentioned that more effective training may not be a fiscal possibility at this time, and that the work is never done.

### **Summary**

There is an interconnectedness of these themes. There is a lack of consistency in the industry, a need to build trust and early interventions which can be very time intensive, coupled with not enough funding and capacity issues within Fraternity and Sorority Life offices. This is contributing to the burnout of these Student Affairs Professionals that are under a tremendous amount of stress where students are making life or death decisions every weekend. It illuminates the need to correct the funding discrepancies and staffing resources that exist between departments such as the Fraternity and Sorority Life office and the Athletics Department, both of which lead the way for university retention of students, donations, and loyalty to the institution.

In the next chapter, these findings will be discussed in relation to existing literature, with recommendations for improving the institutional policies and practices. These recommendations will focus on enhancing the university's ability to support the Fraternity and Sorority community on their campus.

## CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

### Introduction

On December 11, 2024, the Stop Campus Hazing Act passed through the U.S. Senate and will go to the President Biden's desk for signature into law (Rock, 2024). While this passed after the interviews with student affairs professionals were already completed, it does validate and support the research findings that federal laws around the definition of hazing were needed. The bipartisan legislation passed with three primary components. This includes hazing statistics in annual security reports, the implementation of hazing prevention policy and education, as well as the compilation of a campus hazing transparency report that would list hazing violations on each campus so that students and their parents can decide which organization is best for them. Rock (2024) also shared the definition of hazing that was outlined in the Stop Campus Hazing Act as:

Any intentional, knowing, or reckless act committed during initiation into, an affiliation with, or the maintenance of membership in, a student organization that includes any activity that places another person in reasonable fear of bodily harm through the use of threatening words or conduct.

While it will certainly take some time to filter down to every college campus and every student in the country after the President signs it into law, there are some additional findings in this research that college campuses should consider.

This chapter discusses the findings from this study on Student Affairs professionals' understanding of hazing on their public and private institutions across the United States.

Specifically, the research focused on their definitions of hazing, the early warning signs of hazing on their campuses across a variety of councils, and what intervention typically looked like on their campus. Through a qualitative approach, participants shared their lived experiences, providing insights into the challenges they face in a challenging environment that consists of new hazing activities, differing definitions of hazing between various stakeholders in their community, inconsistencies in actions versus stated values, different levels of prevention activities across campus departments, different hazing reporting structures, and the funding/capacity issues in their office.

In synthesizing these findings, this chapter connects the results of this study to the existing body of literature, through critical analysis each of the participants' experiences, offering a deeper understanding of the issues and lenses that shape their understanding of hazing. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the limitations of the study, practical implications for higher education institutions, and recommendations for future research. The following research questions guide the study:

- **RQ1:** How do student affairs professionals describe their definition of hazing?
- **RQ2:** How is hazing prevention and intervention addressed through practices, priorities, and policies?

### **Summary of Key Findings**

The findings from this study offer valuable insights into the lived experiences of Student Affairs professionals who are advising Fraternity and Sorority communities on college campuses

across the United States. Through qualitative interviews, several themes emerged that reveal the complexities of the job and the rapidly changing environment that they face today.

First, participants consistently expressed concern over the inconsistencies around hazing within Fraternity and Sorority life. In order to reduce hazing activity on college campuses, student affairs professionals must have a consistent, federal definition of hazing in the United States. The Stop Campus Hazing Act has passed in the House of Representatives and the U.S. Senate (Rock, 2024). It is the first federal law to address hazing, so now it is time to bring awareness to the public. Clearly, the public can no longer operate with different definitions of hazing between states, campuses, national fraternity/sorority headquarters, alumni, students, and student affairs professionals. As consistent with the literature, gaps may lie in these definitions (Feuer, 2019), scholars and legislatures have historically struggled to define hazing as definitions of hazing have been broad and indefinite (Parks, 2015). They also leave loopholes for what hazing is and the penalties for participating (Banks & Archibald, 2020).

Professionals in the industry must differentiate between hazing activities and hazardous drinking activities without automatically lumping them into the same bucket, as each will have different prevention activities associated with the behavior. As a result of the new federal law, the literature suggests that hazing might grow worse, which would be attributed to Reactance Theory where individuals perceive their ability to perform free behaviors is threatened, and the attractiveness of the threatened behavior increases to show their control over the system (Johnson, 2017).

Technology is also changing activities around the new member process, including trends such as PledgeTok on social media, so administrators must examine these behaviors and determine if they are truly hazing activities in cases where students classify the activity as entertainment and there are no victims. It is important for Student Affairs professionals to be aware of the changing nature of these hazing activities and not assume the traditional hazing activities for specific councils. As consistent with the literature, educating the new members on responsible social media use and how Greek life should be portrayed is critical (Johnson, 2017), humiliating hazing posts on social media may motivate longer hazing endurance (Schiffer, 2022), and hazing victims may face additional emotional stress when people outside of the chapter view the hazing on social media (Johnson, 2017).

The sub-theme of inconsistency of actions versus stated values continuously appears in prior research (Parks, 2019) as well as this current research. Fraternities need to encourage diversity within their organizations and stop engaging in hazing behaviors as a means of demonstrating manliness as described by Allan (2024). Ultimately, if students are making decisions and taking actions within their organizations that do not reflect the stated values of their Fraternity or Sorority, then there will be difficulty in recruiting new students that match those organizational values. As consistent with the literature, group initiations with a high level of severity such as embarrassment or harassment that are not consistent with organizational values led to negative emotions such as loneliness, frustration, depression, and members feeling less bonded to their group (Alexander & Opsal, 2021). This research has shown that students will leave their organizations because of hazing activities in their organization, which is

contrary to the mission of Fraternities and Sororities, as well as higher education. The media will also consistently call out behavior that does not match these stated values (Wiese, 2024).

The sub-theme of inconsistencies in hazing prevention and hazing reporting is troublesome, as the public should have the same standards for universities in hazing transparency as well as the national fraternities and sororities so students can make decisions based on real data. The organizations that are repeat offenders will put more resources into resolving hazing in their organization in order to make it more appealing for students to join across the country. Even within the institution itself, the research shows hazing exists not only in Fraternity and Sorority Life, but also in areas such as athletics, the band, ROTC, honor societies, and more. Therefore, all departments should share in the responsibility to educate and prevent hazing on campus and lessen the burden on Fraternity and Sorority Life. As consistent with the literature, many students believe it was their choice to participate so they did not report it, and others do not realize they were hazed until later in time (Bruckner, 2018), which makes accurate reporting even more difficult.

The next theme of building trust and early intervention was an important one, especially for new Student Affairs professionals. Several of the participants highlighted various points throughout the new member process, as well as after members are initiated, to review campus policies around hazing. Touch points were critical with chapter presidents, chapter executive board councils, and the new members themselves throughout the new member process. Students need to feel that the administration is truly interested in changing the behavior versus removing the recognition of the organization in order to build trust. As consistent with the literature, Pike (2000) found modest but positive association in affiliated members for active

learning and interactions with faculty. Mathiasen (2001) noted Chickering's vector of *developing integrity* and how colleges force one to shift from rules and norms to a more personal view. Also consistent with the literature, Pike (2024) reports higher levels of reflective and integrative learning, student-faculty interaction, and collaborative learning for Fraternity and Sorority members over independent students. While this takes more work to do, affiliated students are more likely to accept responsibility for their actions. Early intervention makes it much easier to resolve problems before they become too large to manage, and at that point, the only recourse is to remove recognition of the organization. Relationships and trust between the fraternity and sorority headquarters, independent hazing prevention consultants, and the Fraternity and Sorority Life office was seen as helpful in resolving hazing cases.

Finally, the last theme of funding and capacity issues within Fraternity and Sorority Life offices deserves attention if universities want to stop hazing on college campuses. Universities need more research within hazing prevention to share best practices with upper administration for a more consistent approach on hazing prevention initiatives. With new members joining the Fraternity and Sorority community every six months, as well as the new law from the Stop Campus Hazing Act that will take time to build awareness, universities cannot expect to do hazing prevention programming once every two years with any meaningful results. Universities must keep the hazing prevention education consistent, which could include book clubs, podcast listening sessions, or movie screenings with facilitation. As consistent with the literature, Garcia (2022) mentions the five foundational areas of working as a Sorority and Fraternity Life Professional that includes governance, systems, student safety, student learning, and program administration through meetings with chapter presidents, following chapter social media sites,

professional associations/networks, and doing research. This is a heavy lift for a small department.

Students are bringing their hazing experiences from high school into college communities, and they are expecting similar behavior within the Fraternity and Sorority community. How do universities change that expectation? Universities must build a culture within Fraternity and Sorority Life that underscore long-lasting careers for staff, investment in the department to continue promotion of higher student retention within the Fraternity and Sorority community, and the development of students into leaders that understand why mental and physical abuse is not helpful in building a strong organization. Finally, these Student Affairs professionals are under a significant amount of stress, so administrators must make significant efforts to promote the well-being of leaders and staff within Fraternity and Sorority Life as valued members of the campus community to avoid burnout, just as universities have done in other areas such as Athletics. The experience for students within Fraternity and Sorority Life is a valuable one. As consistent with the literature, Malaret (2021) suggests a hazing prevention staff member that is accessible to all students (not just Fraternity and Sorority Life) to provide more comprehensive visibility to hazing. Furthermore, Malaret believes it is a problem when campus professionals often report spending more time responding to incidents than planning and implementing primary prevention.

By looking at student involvement as an undergraduate, one can see Kolb's four different learning types at play. As fraternity chapter president, this researcher instinctively understood that the fraternity chapter had many different personalities and learning styles within the organization. There were some in the diverging group that preferred group work and

brainstorming. These members served the chapter in the role of committee chairmen and were very good in facilitating discussions and interactions among various members. There were others that had an assimilating learning style, and they were generally the ones attending lectures on campus and national leadership conferences to bring information back to the group. Other members were considered converging learning styles, and they typically served on Executive Board because they were the problem solvers of the group. Finally, the chapter had to accommodate the learning styles of members who were leading the way in community service and hands-on activities (Killam, 2017) with other members. The advantage was knowing which types of learning styles each member had and putting them in the right seats so that the organization was moving in the right direction based on their strengths.

As a professional later on in life, I would leverage the four main developmental stages in groups of initial, transitional, working, and termination stages (Killam, 2017) as my team and I started new chapters of the fraternity on various college campuses across North America. One could see the initial stage when students who had never met each other before got in a room and looked to me, the lead headquarters staff member, to facilitate discussions about what the new group could become on this campus. When headquarters stepped back, the transition stage started where students would have intense activity and engagement towards getting their charter and becoming an officially recognized organization on campus. There is a working stage when the group is chartered, and now members figure out on their own how to work together and experience challenges as a group. The termination stage sometimes occurs as seniors graduate, or when a chapter closes completely, and there is real learning happening

here when students share their feelings at the end of their journey. The students and this valuable leadership experience should be protected.

Chickering's (1969) framework is clearly heightened within fraternity and sorority membership through the development of competence, expressing themselves within the organization, the move towards interdependence, development of interpersonal relationships, building a strong sense of identity, creating a sense of purpose, and promoting integrity. Furthermore, Schlossberg's Transition Theory of assisting students through their transitions of moving into college, moving through college learning, and moving out into their careers (Killam, 2017) are all visibly present through the Fraternity and Sorority leadership experience. It explains the findings of higher levels of reflective and integrative learning, student-faculty interaction, and collaborative learning for Fraternity and Sorority members over independent students (Pike, 2024).

The literature gave the reasons for hazing which is organized into six primary functions including a rite of passage, alignment of individual and group identity, exerting power and dominance, discouraging freeloaders, group cohesion, and moral disengagement according to Allan (2020). This can easily turn deadly for new members when alcohol consumption is based on a system of rewards and punishments, where alcohol is a privilege that represents membership in Fraternity and Sorority Life (Parks, 2019). If the National Association of Insurance Commissioners rank fraternities as only slightly less risky than hazardous waste disposal companies and asbestos contracts, then it is critical to address this issue of hazing. Otherwise, students will get injured and liability insurance premiums will continue to climb until the cost of joining becomes too high for new members (Parks, 2022). While educators in the

field continue to share existing hazing case law and outcomes with the students, the challenge presented is the normalcy bias that exists with the logic that if it has never occurred in our chapter or at our university, then that is reason enough to believe that the event will never happen (Parks & Parisi, 2019).

In sum, these findings address the study's research questions by illuminating the many challenges that Student Affairs professionals face as they work to prevent hazing activity in this critical campus population. The results suggest that the public desperately needed a federal definition of hazing to eliminate confusion, administrators must be aware of the changing hazing activities with the introduction of new technologies, universities need a more consistent and wide-reaching approach across departments in the fight against hazing, and trust as well as early intervention is critical in making progress in the fight against hazing. Additionally, the limited resources and limited staff within Fraternity and Sorority Life offices is making this goal even harder to achieve.

### **Unexpected Findings**

This study's unexpected findings revealed critical aspects of Student Affairs professionals' experiences that were not initially anticipated. These findings offered valuable insights into areas where institutional practices and policies, as well as laws, may not align with the actual needs of students. These policies and laws around hazing prevention, while well-intentioned, might actually be preventing students from coming forward and reporting this hazing behavior.

Chad talked about the police are not convicting in these cases, so the laws will not make a difference. In terms of accountability, Chad sees it being done more using an organizational lens, less so on an individual lens (Chad, personal communication, October 23, 2024). This is problematic. The public needs judges and police that will enforce the law to discourage students from engaging in hazing activities. More research needs to be done to determine if the new hazing laws are working. For example, states already have laws on assault and battery (Parks, 2019). If legislators create new laws specifically for hazing that involve actions such as assault and battery, are these students getting lesser sentences under the hazing laws versus another group of people being sentenced under the traditional assault and battery laws? Why are universities not individually prosecuting those responsible for the hazing activity instead of looking at it through an organizational lens? As the literature indicated, when the university does not hold the hazer responsible, the hazing is reinforced because it is as if the university is condoning the hazing behaviors (Bruckner, 2018).

Due process at public institutions continues to be an issue, as students still see public universities engaging in system-wide Fraternity and Sorority shutdowns of social privileges or recruitment activity when an organization is suspected of engaging in hazing activities or a sexual assault occurs. This goes against the student code of conduct, it violates the student's rights, and is ineffective because now students are less willing to come forward and report these hazing activities or sexual assaults in another organization on campus knowing that their own organization could be penalized. Zhang (2016) shows that several principles for public institutions are well established, including:

- Rules must be consistently fair, reasonable, and not capricious or arbitrary.

- The code of conduct should be written and available for all to see.
- Blanket prohibitions are not permitted.

On a similar note, administrators must create a culture of care at the institution where students are empowered to report hazing activities without fear of getting in trouble. As Elisa described, “we look out for one another, we take care of each other, this is a family environment, and if you see someone hurt you are going to get them help” (Elisa, personal conversation, October 30, 2024). They have medical amnesty policies that protect the students when they report activity that puts the health and safety of students first and foremost. More campuses need to adopt these amnesty policies and be absolutely sure that students are aware of them. The literature clearly shows that students did not report hazing activities because they did not want to get their group in trouble, they were afraid of negative personal consequences, they were afraid other members of the group would find out who reported it, and they did not know where to report it (Allan, 2008).

Are the new federal hazing laws going to be effective? Fiona said that she is looking to be compliant with the law, but she wants to bring culture change (Fiona, personal conversation, October 30, 2024). Clearly, there is big distinction in the minds of Student Affairs professionals between checking a box and getting results in terms of culture change, and their priority is with culture change. Henry is conflicted. He believes that the students are talking to administration or staff because they need help, but going straight to student conduct will result in a full investigation, which would reduce reporting on his campus. Henry’s institution has created a system that circumvents the laws in his state. They have contracts with well recognized hazing prevention experts external to the university to work with chapters, talk candidly with the

chapters about the specific behaviors, help them adjust, and adapt. They have intervention conversations where students can be honest and feel safer. When the contract ends, it goes away (Henry, personal conversation, November 7, 2024).

In this case, the university has no insight into whether the issue was successfully resolved or not, but rely on the external professional to fix it, because that is safer solution for the student that also encourages students to report the activity. This chapter is now excluded from the law mandate to publicly report hazing violation for a 5-year period, and students/parents have no data to tell them about the violation when considering which organization on campus to join. This is new information for many universities around the country, as well as lawmakers, parents, and students, and it should make the public look at these hazing laws in a new light. Universities must question whether these well-intended laws will encourage students to come forward and report the behaviors, or if they will have the opposite effect. Henry concluded on this topic by saying:

Before our state laws changed, we were engaging in prevention education conversations about what was happening in our new member processes very directly. That has in a lot of ways tied our hands in a way that has pushed the behavior further out to the periphery for departments like mine (Henry, personal conversation, November 7, 2024).

Reflecting on the literature, institutions must have clear definitions on what hazing is and what are the penalties for participating (Banks & Archibald, 2020).

Another unexpected finding was the lack of data in the profession. Henry said:

The fact that we don't really have a way to track organization membership, either at the campus level or the national level, in any meaningful way is shocking to me. A chapter can drop a member for hazing and he can go join another chapter (Henry, personal conversation, November 7, 2024).

Given the size and scope of the Fraternity and Sorority community as described this research, having more robust data systems to track members, track members who violate the policies, as well as the positive work that each chapter is doing on philanthropy and community service both on a university level and a national fraternity/sorority level would help the industry to tell a more complete story about who members are and what members do.

Finally, the emotional burden being placed on Student Affairs professionals who are understaffed was alarming to the researcher. When student affairs professionals are genuinely scared of the activities that students are engaged in every weekend, or they describe the hazing activities on their campus as jarring, universities must ask whether the resources in terms of funding and staff that are currently being allocating to these departments to proactively address these issues is enough. Universities owe it to students and staff to do more. While one of the initial codes selected by the researcher was "personal experiences" of hazing, none of the participants brought up any stories or reflections of hazing in their own undergraduate experiences, but instead focused on hazing experiences they had most recently seen as professionals in the industry.

In conclusion, these unexpected findings reveal critical areas where institutional practices and policies may fall short in addressing the needs of the Fraternity and Sorority

students. The lack of consistency in hazing definitions, the changing hazing activities, inconsistencies with reporting and prevention activities across campus departments, and funding/capacity issues within the Fraternity and Sorority Life offices all point to areas where further research and educational reform are needed. These findings contribute to the broader conversation on how universities can create safer campuses for their students.

### **Limitations of the Study**

This study provides valuable insights into the experiences of Student Affairs professionals at both public and private institutions across the United States, particularly focusing on hazing prevention, hazing reporting, and hazing interventions. However, several limitations should be acknowledged, which may affect the findings' generalizability, depth, and scope.

#### ***Sample Size and Participant Diversity***

One of the primary limitations of this study is the relatively small sample size. The study included nine participants. The limited number of participants may constrain generalizability of the findings to the broader population of Fraternity and Sorority communities. While the participants represented universities, both public and private, from all regions of the country, a more expansive sample could have uncovered additional nuances, particularly around new hazing trends across regions of the United States and how the various state hazing laws have impacted reporting on these campuses. Future research could integrate a larger, more diverse sample size or employ mixed methods approaches to develop a stronger understanding of the research problems or questions (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

### ***Focus on Fraternity and Sorority Communities***

Another limitation is the study's emphasis on Fraternity and Sorority students. While these perspectives are critical given the increasing scrutiny of hazing in this particular community, the focus on Fraternity and Sorority communities may not fully capture the experiences of student-athletes or other student groups experiencing hazing. As consistent with the literature, Allan (2008) confirms hazing across a range of groups including athletic teams, club sports, intramurals, and many more student organizations. Therefore, future studies should include both Fraternity and Sorority communities as well as Athletics communities to provide a more comprehensive understanding of all student experiences with hazing activities.

### ***Self-Reported Data and Social Desirability Bias***

As with most qualitative research, this study relies on self-reported data, which can introduce potential limitations related to social desirability bias. Bernardi (2023) describes social desirability response bias as a participant's tendency to over (under) report activities that are socially desirable (undesirable), and he finds it to be a pervasive issue with self-reported data that can lead to misleading results. Student Affairs professionals may have hesitated to provide critical hazing insight on their campus due to concerns about potential repercussions despite assurances of confidentiality. To address these limitations in future research, Bernardi (2023) suggests three approaches to control for social desirability bias including self-administered questionnaires, indirect questioning, and direct measurement. This would lessen reliance on self-reported data and offer a more comprehensive view.

### ***Potential Researcher Bias***

Given the researcher's active role in data collection and analysis, there is potential for researcher bias in this study. Steps were taken to minimize this bias such as reflexive journaling and peer debriefing, however, the researcher's interpretation of the findings is shaped by the background listed in the Reflexivity Statement, including things such as gender, culture, history with hazing, and socioeconomic origin (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). To mitigate this limitation in future studies, incorporating multiple researchers could help to minimize the influence of this bias.

### **Implications for Practice**

The findings of this study reveal significant gaps in current institutional hazing prevention, reporting, and intervention initiatives on college campuses. These insights provide a foundation for actionable improvements within higher education. The following implications for practice reflect the recommendations to address these challenges:

#### ***Create Greater Awareness of the Federal Laws on Hazing That Encourage Students to Come Forward***

Not only did the public need federal laws on hazing definitions to eliminate any ambiguity on what hazing is, the students also need to be treated similarly and fairly in order to achieve true accountability across all states and all Fraternity/Sorority organizations without fear of coming forward. It will act as a deterrent to other students from engaging in unlawful hazing activities, it will promote a sense of justice among the families who are impacted by hazing deaths and injuries, and it will more accurately reflect the morals and values embedded within Fraternities and Sororities. For any laws that are created on a federal level, universities

and legislators must be sure that students are not fearful of reporting hazing behaviors on campus, either because they will experience negative consequences personally or they will endure penalties that impact all Fraternities and Sororities on campus in a negative way. While the Stop Campus Hazing Act has a few of these pieces, the Cornell public health prevention model that was outlined in the literature is much more comprehensive with eight elements: leadership and culture change strategies, policy initiatives, educational initiatives, positive team-building, reporting options, enforcement, support for victims, and transparency regarding violations (Marchell, 2024).

The Fraternity and Sorority Political Action Committee (FSPAC) can leverage this research with candidates and legislators at the federal level in order to advocate for better hazing laws that meet the needs of students without suppressing campus reporting. This reinforces the suggestions from Malaret (2021) on different levels of penalty to protect individuals who report hazing from retaliation, as well as protecting organizations who openly admit to hazing and want to remove perpetrators from their organization.

### ***Create a Functioning Hazing Prevention Task Force with Campus-Wide Representation***

Hazing is a campus culture issue that extends well beyond just Fraternity and Sorority Life. Coalitions must be created on campus with campus-wide representation with comprehensive plans, including the Dean of Students, Fraternity and Sorority Life, Athletics, Student Conduct, Student Activities, Title IX, Campus Safety, Residence Life, Cultural Centers, Legal Affairs, Alumni Advisors, Local Community Leaders, National Fraternity/Sorority Representatives, Institutional Researchers, and Hazing Prevention Specialists. Shared budgets

and shared resources can then be utilized for hazing prevention initiatives across the entire campus, as well as information sharing across departments to identify hazing trends. This is reinforced in the prior research by Swan (2023) that suggests communities who are further along the readiness continuum experience greater levels of effectiveness and sustainability. Swan also found that campus communities were identified as ready for prevention had fully functioning coalitions with campus-wide representations and they were trained in hazing prevention for three or more years.

### ***Create Transparency in Hazing Reporting Across Universities and National Organizations***

For instances in which students are found guilty of hazing, the university will publish the organization's violation on the university website for a five-year period so that student and families can make more informed decisions on which organization they will join. In addition, national fraternities and sororities will publish any chapters that are found guilty of hazing on their website for a five-year period. This transparency will improve the relationships between the institution and the national organizations and unite them in the common mission of removing hazing. Ultimately, any organization that has recurring hazing activity or a culture of hazing embedded in the organization would be held accountable in this system.

### ***Create a National Database of Fraternity/Sorority Members to Advocate for the Community***

The industry currently lacks a national database that tracks fraternity and sorority membership, as well as accurately tracking important metrics such as GPA, philanthropy dollars raised, and community service hours. In addition, any member that is found guilty of hazing behaviors or other violations would be tracked in the database so that it can be cross-

referenced in the new member process to ensure universities are not reintroducing a problem member into a new campus community. This will also be helpful in tracking members in unrecognized fraternities and sororities from campus rosters.

### ***Invest More Resources and Staffing for the Fraternity and Sorority Life Office***

Given the retention data for students in this community, it is important to invest in similar support structures for students in the Fraternity and Sorority Life community as seen in other areas of campus such as athletics. There is dedicated staffing for the various needs of the community, plus resources for consistent hazing prevention education, reporting, and early interventions every semester. Parents and chapter alumni must play an active role in this education, reporting, and intervention process. Administrators must consider research showing 25% of students reporting that alumni were present during the hazing activities, and some alumni are also involved with charitable giving to the institution (Allan, 2024). Part of this plan should include education for parents and alumni, a local anonymous hazing prevention hotline, and local anonymous hazing prevention form on the university website to report any suspected violation of the hazing policies on campus.

Suicides and mental health issues such as depression, loneliness, and anxiety among college students are rising, while higher positive mental health scores and lower mean scores related to depression and anxiety exist within the Fraternity and Sorority community (Grace, 2022). These metrics will help to improve the retention of students on college campuses, but that will only grow if the Fraternity and Sorority community can get the additional resources and adequate staffing that the student affairs professionals are asking for (Esquenazi, 2021).

### ***Start Educating on Hazing Prevention in K – 12***

At a time of declining enrollment in higher education, organizations have an opportunity to start educating before college students reach college campuses. While a component of education will always reside where the violations are taking place, universities, national headquarters, and fraternal associations can begin to move upstream and start to engage students in high schools and junior high schools when students will first encounter hazing activities to help them understand what hazing is, how to report it, and how to replace it with healthier alternatives. Administrators within the K – 12 schools might have limited budgets, but they would welcome professionals from college campuses to help answer student questions and concerns around hazing, as well as to assist with the transition from K – 12 to college campuses. This might be a good opportunity to talk about available scholarships, mentoring opportunities, job opportunities, and other resources to help attract more students into higher education.

We know from the literature that hazing secures respect, credibility, and status for the individuals who participate in these activities (Parks, 2015). As Harris (2010) discussed, what if our institutions gave the students permission to stop being who they felt they had to be and instead the students received permission to be who they aspired to be?

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

While this study provides valuable insights into the experiences of Student Affairs professionals with hazing, several areas warrant further investigation. Expanding the scope of research beyond the limitations of this study will contribute to a more comprehensive

understanding of how hazing laws impact various student populations across different institutional settings. The following recommendations for future research are critical for advancing the field.

Future research should continue to advance and clarify the findings of this study. Additional research about the culture of hazing seen by Student Affairs professionals would be beneficial for understanding the similarities and differences regionally in the United States, as well as the similarities and differences seen between public versus private institutions. Additional research encompassing more campuses and institutional types such as Historically Black Colleges and Universities or Single-Sex Colleges would provide more insight into Fraternity and Sorority Life.

There would also be value in repeating this study for National Fraternity and Sorority Headquarters staff. Although each national Fraternity and Sorority has the same prescribed values, the interpretations of these values and cultures within each chapter would be different. Looking at the similarities and differences in answers from the campus study could provide more insight and opportunities for collaboration.

Subsequent studies should explore how chapter characteristics impact organizational culture and hazing behaviors such as chapter size, housed versus unhoused chapters, chapter age, number of involved alumni advisors, duration of the new member process, and chapter disciplinary history. There could be some models that have less inherent risk.

Future studies might explore the impact of sustained educational programming on chapter culture and campus culture. Universities should also consider research on the impact of

peer educators and internal student champions in conjunction with external partners on hazing prevention efforts.

The current study provides a snapshot of Student Affairs professionals' experiences at a single point in time. However, a longitudinal approach would be essential to fully understanding the long-term impact of hazing prevention, reporting, and intervention techniques over several years, allowing researchers to assess how their experiences with hazing evolve over time and the impact of continued institutional support and additional resources over an extended period.

## **Conclusion**

In summary, this study urges higher education institutions to invest in their Fraternity and Sorority Life offices, hazing prevention programs, and institutional practices to support their students. The findings show that students and administrators have different definitions of hazing all across the country, new hazing activities and trends are emerging, there are inconsistencies in hazing prevention activities across campus departments, reporting of hazing activities varies across campuses despite recent laws to make them more uniform, and funding/capacity issues within Fraternity and Sorority Life offices is not allowing for consistent hazing prevention education and early intervention within the student body. More collaboration is needed in the short term with other departments, alumni members, parents, and national headquarters. Long term, universities must invest in Student Affairs professionals, their well-being, their available resources, and their staffing models so they feel valued, supported, and empowered to lead a culture change on their campus.

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## APPENDIX A

### Opening Information:

*Intro: To facilitate our note-taking, we would like to audio and video tape our conversations today. Please sign the release form. For your information, only researchers on the project will be privy to the tapes which will be eventually destroyed after they are transcribed. In addition, you must sign a form devised to meet our human subject requirements. Essentially, this document states that: (1) all information will be held confidential, (2) your participation is voluntary and you may stop at any time if you feel uncomfortable, and (3) we do not intend to inflict any harm. Thank you for your agreeing to participate.*

*We have planned this interview to last no longer than one hour.*

### Introduction

You have been selected to speak with us today because you have been identified as someone who has a great deal to share about fraternities and sororities on this campus. Our research project as a whole focuses on the improvement of hazing prevention initiatives, with particular interest in understanding how campus administrators are engaged in this activity, how they assess hazing activity, and whether we can begin to share what we observe in order to facilitate student affairs professional education. Our study does not aim to evaluate your techniques or experiences. Rather, we are trying to learn more about hazing trends, visible observations by the community, and hopefully learn best practices that will help improve student safety on our campuses.

I am going to record today's interview and will ask some demographic types of questions but will give you a pseudonym and will ensure that your personal identity is kept confidential in anything written. Do I have your permission to record the interview?

**If no** – Thank you for your time, but if I cannot record the interview I will need to find another interviewee. I appreciate your willingness to meet with me and wish you a wonderful day.

**If yes** - Thank you for your willingness to participate in this interview. Now, we will begin. As we go throughout the interview I am going to follow a scripted list of questions but may ask a few follow-up questions, request examples, and so forth, but for the most part I want you to provide as much detail and as honest as responses as you can and I thank you in advance for doing so.

Are you ready to begin? If no, provide time so that they are ready and then continue.

**Continue:** I am going to begin by asking you a few basic demographic questions and a few about your perspective on the topic of hazing. From there, I will ask a set of questions that explore your priorities, practices, and perspectives on issues in hazing prevention.

**Questions:**

Set I: Demographic Questions

1. How long have you been working at this institution?
2. Are you affiliated with a fraternity or sorority? If so, which council?
3. For how many years have you been advising the fraternity and sorority community at this institution?
4. Which council(s) are you currently advising?

Set II: Perspective of Hazing

1. Can you please explain your definition of hazing?
2. Explain to what extent you believe that hazing exists within your community.

Set III: Instructional Priorities and Practices

1. How is hazing prevention and intervention addressed through practices, priorities, and policies on your campus?
2. When it comes to hazing in your community, what signs of hazing were visible to you or others on campus?
3. What are some of the different ways members refer to hazing activities without actually using the term hazing?
4. What differences do you see in terms of hazing in fraternities versus sororities?
5. What differences do you see in terms of hazing in historically white fraternities and sororities versus multicultural organizations or historically black fraternities and sororities?
6. What was the intervention point for chapters on your campus?
7. What do you see as your role in preventing hazing on campus? Can you explain using some examples?
8. Can you describe a lesson that you believe is especially important for other student affairs professionals that relates in some way to hazing prevention? Can you explain why you think it is so important?
9. Based on your experience and knowledge, do you feel that higher education is making progress in the fight against hazing? If yes, please elaborate in what ways, and if no, why not.
10. Is there anything else you'd like to share given what we've talked about today?

**Debriefing:** Thank you so much for taking the time to share your perspectives on this issue with me. Please do not hesitate to reach out and follow up with any questions and thank you again for your time.

If you have questions about this research, you may contact either Michael Ayalon at [michael.ayalon@mtsu.edu](mailto:michael.ayalon@mtsu.edu) or Dr. Kim Godwin at [kim.godwin@mtsu.edu](mailto:kim.godwin@mtsu.edu).

For additional information about giving consent or your rights as a participant in this study, please contact the Middle Tennessee State University (MTSU) Office of Compliance at 615-494-8918 or via email at [irb\\_information@mtsu.edu](mailto:irb_information@mtsu.edu) or by visiting their website at <http://www.mtsu.edu/irb>.

## APPENDIX B

Subject Line for Email Recruitment: Research study on hazing in college fraternities and sororities

Body of Email:

Dear [Name],

I am conducting a research study at Middle Tennessee State University on the Early Warning Signs of Hazing in College Fraternities and Sororities. Participation in this study will take approximately 45 minutes on Zoom. There is no compensation for this research study. There are no known risks involved in this research.

If you are interested, please let me know so we can get your informed consent form signed and schedule a Zoom interview at a convenient time for you.

Michael R. Ayalon

516-642-3108

[michael.ayalon@mtsu.edu](mailto:michael.ayalon@mtsu.edu)

Study Description and Purpose: Our research project as a whole focuses on the improvement of hazing prevention initiatives, with particular interest in understanding how campus administrators are engaged in this activity, how they assess hazing activity, and whether we can begin to share what we observe in order to facilitate student affairs professional education. Our study does not aim to evaluate your techniques or experiences. Rather, we are trying to learn more about hazing trends, visible observations by the community, and hopefully learn best practices that will help improve student safety on our campuses.

IRB Details:

Study Title:

Protocol Number:

Approval Date:

Principal Investigator:

Institution: Middle Tennessee State University

Target Population: Student Affairs Professionals who advise college fraternity and sorority communities

Risks & Benefits: We are asking you to share with us information regarding hazing that you have experienced either personally or professionally in your community, and you may feel uncomfortable talking about some of these topics. You do not have to answer any question or take part in the interview if you don't wish to do so, and that is also fine. You do not have to give us any reason for not responding to any question or for refusing to take part in the interview.

There will be no direct benefit to you, but your participation is likely to help us find out more about how to prevent hazing in your Fraternity and Sorority community, as well as on other college campuses as well.

Contact Information: 516-642-3108 or by email: [michael.ayalon@mtsu.edu](mailto:michael.ayalon@mtsu.edu)

Principal Investigator: Michael R. Ayalon

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Kim Godwin

Contact Information: 615-898-2612 or by email at: [kim.godwin@mtsu.edu](mailto:kim.godwin@mtsu.edu)

For additional information about your rights as a participant in this study, please contact the Middle Tennessee State University (MTSU) Office of Compliance at 615-494-8918 or via email at [irb\\_information@mtsu.edu](mailto:irb_information@mtsu.edu). (<http://www.mtsu.edu/irb>)

## APPENDIX C

### INFORMED CONSENT

Study Title: The Early Signs of Hazing in College Fraternities and Sororities

Principal Investigator: Michael R. Ayalon

Institution: Middle Tennessee State University

Name of participant: \_\_\_\_\_ Age: \_\_\_\_\_

You are being asked to participate in a research project. The following information is provided to inform you about the research project and your participation in it. Please read this form carefully. You will be given an opportunity to ask questions, and your questions will be answered. Also, you will be given a copy of this consent form.

Your participation in this research study is voluntary. You are free to withdraw from this study at any time with no penalty and no loss of benefits already earned. In the event new information becomes available that may affect the risks or benefits associated with this research study or your willingness to participate in it, you will be notified so that you can make an informed decision about whether or not to continue your participation.

1. Purpose of the study: Our research project as a whole focuses on the improvement of hazing prevention initiatives, with particular interest in understanding how campus administrators are engaged in this activity, how they assess hazing activity, and whether we can begin to share what we observe in order to facilitate student affairs professional education. Our study does not aim to evaluate your techniques or experiences. Rather, we are trying to learn more about hazing trends, visible observations by the community, and hopefully learn best practices that will help improve student safety on our campuses.

2. Description of procedures to be followed and approximate duration of the study: We are asking you to help us learn more about hazing in your Fraternity and Sorority community. We are inviting you to take part in this research project. If you accept, you will be asked to participate in an interview with Michael Ayalon. During the interview, I will meet with you on Zoom either at home or at work. If you do not wish to answer any of the questions during the interview, you may say so and I will move on to the next question. No one else but the interviewer will be present unless you would like someone else to be there. The information recorded is confidential, and no one else except Michael Ayalon will access the information documented during your interview. The entire interview will be recorded on Zoom, but nobody will be identified by name on the recording. The recording will be stored on the cloud in a password protected account. The information recorded is confidential, and no one else except

for Michael Ayalon will have access to the recordings. The recordings will be destroyed after 12 weeks. The research interview takes place on one day, and it is typically 45 minutes in duration.

3. Expected costs: \$0

4. Description of the discomforts, inconveniences, and/or risks that can be reasonably expected as a result of participation in this study: We are asking you to share with us information regarding hazing that you have experienced either personally or professionally in your community, and you may feel uncomfortable talking about some of these topics. You do not have to answer any question or take part in the interview if you don't wish to do so, and that is also fine. You do not have to give us any reason for not responding to any question or for refusing to take part in the interview.

5. Compensation in case of study-related injury: \$0

6. Anticipated benefits from this study: There will be no direct benefit to you, but your participation is likely to help us find out more about how to prevent hazing in your Fraternity and Sorority community, as well as on other college campuses as well.

7. Compensation for participation: \$0

8. What happens if you choose to withdraw from study participation: You do not have to take part in this research if you do not wish to do so. You may stop participating in the interview at any time that you wish. I will give you an opportunity at the end of the interview to review your remarks, and you can ask to modify or remove portions of those if you do not agree with my notes or if I did not understand you correctly.

9. Contact Information: If you should have any questions about this research study or possible injury, please contact:

Principal Investigator: Michael R. Ayalon

Contact Information: 516-642-3108 or by email at: [michael.ayalon@mtsu.edu](mailto:michael.ayalon@mtsu.edu)

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Kim Godwin

Contact Information: 615-898-2612 or by email at: [kim.godwin@mtsu.edu](mailto:kim.godwin@mtsu.edu)

For additional information about giving consent or your rights as a participant in this study, please contact the Middle Tennessee State University (MTSU) Office of Compliance at 615-494-8918 or via email at [irb\\_information@mtsu.edu](mailto:irb_information@mtsu.edu). (<http://www.mtsu.edu/irb>)

10. Confidentiality: All efforts, within reason, will be made to keep the personal information in your research record private, but total privacy cannot be promised. Your information may be shared with people at MTSU (such as the MTSU Institutional Review Board) or other agencies

(such as the Federal Government Office for Human Research Protection) if you or someone else is in danger or if we are required to do so by law.

#### 11. STATEMENT BY PERSON AGREEING TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY

I have read this informed consent document and the material contained in it has been explained to me. I understand each part of the document, my questions have been answered, and I freely and voluntarily choose to participate in this study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of participant

Consent obtained by:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed name and title