

Reining In Fraternities



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IN 1873, after a fraternity pledge at Cornell University suffered a fatal fall off a cliff, his father said he hoped the calamity would put an end to such “ridiculous mummeries as led to the death of our dear son.” But it didn’t. From 1970 until now, at least one hazing-related death has occurred each year. Colleges are renewing their efforts to prevent such harm, and at the same time preserve the positive values of the Greek system. The eight articles in this collection describe the strategies they are trying.

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Cover photo of students at the U. of Michigan Sigma Chi fraternity house by Jim West/ALAMY



ABBY DREY, CENTRE DAILY TIMES, TNS, GETTY IMAGES

Protesters gathered outside Kappa Delta Rho on Penn State's main campus in March 2015 after news broke that fraternity members had shared unauthorized pictures of nude female students on a private Facebook page.

Do Fraternities Have a Place on the Modern Campus?

They began in an era when college was the domain of well-off white men. Now calls for reform may be greater than ever.

By BETH MCMURTRIE

THROUGHOUT their history, fraternities have taken many forms. They began as early-American literary societies, evolved into clubby training grounds for corporate leaders, and entered the 21st century hung over from the legacy of *Animal House*. They have always reflected the best and worst behaviors of college life, turning out student-government presidents and binge-drinkers alike.

But today people are asking whether fraternities have fallen out of step with the times. A string of ugly incidents has reinforced the image of entitled white men egging each other on to behave badly: chanting racist songs, sharing pictures of incapac-

itated women, hazing their pledges. At their worst, fraternity houses have been the sites of sexual assaults and accidental deaths.

So how did we get here? And is there a place for fraternities on the modern campus?

In some ways, they appear a relic of a bygone era, in which college was largely the purview of white, well-off men. It's no surprise, critics say, that these homogenous, secretive groups with vaguely defined membership criteria regularly get themselves into trouble. The first widely publicized Greek hazing death dates back to the 1870s, and reports of misogynistic, racist, and homophobic acts — often fueled by drinking — have dogged fraternities ever since.

Fraternities also have a lot to recommend them. Greek students tend to be more active on campus than their classmates, and, supporters say, well-managed chapters foster leadership, facilitate service, and provide healthy camaraderie. A disproportionate number of elected officials and heads of major companies have gone through the fraternity system. And most members shun the extreme behaviors that get dozens of chapters in trouble each year.

The pressure for further reform may be greater today than any time since the 1990s, when a cascade of lawsuits led to the first modern restructuring of the system. Victim advocates and frustrated college administrators, along with a steady stream of negative news, have been raising questions about what fraternities value and who is overseeing them. In one month alone this spring, 30 chapters were suspended for offensive or dangerous acts.

Change, however, comes slowly, and even those who agree it is needed cannot agree on what should happen or how. Few anticipate the demise of fraternities. While fewer than 400,000 college undergraduate men, about 11 percent of full-time students, are members, the Greek system as a whole is a national force. In addition to having alumni on Wall Street and Capitol Hill, fraternities and sororities own and manage \$3 billion in student housing and, according to a Bloomberg investigation, several hundred million dollars more in annual revenue and foundation assets.

Yet the 74 organizations that make up the North-American Interfraternity Conference are showing signs of division, with reform-minded ones frustrated by those who talk of problems in terms of a few bad apples. The interfraternity conference recently organized three task forces on hazing, sexual assault, and alcohol, which promise a surgical examination of fraternity culture, in which all treatments are being considered.

"We've really got to address the issues and not circle the wagons," says Walter M. Kimbrough, president of Dillard University and chair of the interfraternity conference's commission on hazing. "I don't want to hear about all the good we've done. That's not an acceptable response anymore."

Colleges, too, are demanding more from fraternities. They are driven, in part, by a more diverse student body that is more likely to reject fraternities' traditionalist characteristics, experts say. Administrators are quicker now to suspend a chapter, and sometimes their entire Greek system, when reports of problematic behavior surface.

The changes under way suggest that both colleges and national organizations are considering a more active role in overseeing chapters, from who is recruited to how students spend their time once they are there.

But there are enormous challenges to making that increased oversight a reality. Money and time are sticking points in any conversation about reform, and colleges and fraternities each think the other is falling short.

For every one college staff person devoted to Greek life there are 750 students, according to estimates by Mark Koepsell, executive director of the Association of Fraternity/Sorority Advisors. By comparison, the ratio of residence-hall advisers and staff members to students is about one to 20. Greek advisers are also some of the youngest and lowest-paid administrators on campus. Universities depend on interfraternity councils, composed of students, to govern chapters and their members.

Meanwhile, national fraternal organizations are thinly staffed, relying on a cadre of volunteers,

"I don't want to hear about all the good we've done. That's not an acceptable response anymore."

often quite young, to keep tabs on their student members. Local alumni advisers have sometimes caused headaches for their national group by defending chapters that have violated fraternity or campus policies. National organizations also hold local chapters at arm's length. While they issue the charter and set rules and policies, the chapters are legally independent from the main organizations. Chapters also risk losing national insurance coverage if someone is hurt because of a policy violation, such as hazing or underage drinking.

Tension between fraternities and colleges has slowed reform efforts. Fraternity alumni sometimes threaten to withhold donations if they are

unhappy with how chapters are treated, and college administrators complain that fraternity headquarters can be unresponsive to their concerns. National fraternities say they are singled out for criticism even though problems like binge drinking and sexual abuse exist on other parts of campus, too. And they've criticized campuswide suspensions of Greek activity while one chapter is being investigated as heavy handed.

The biggest question looming over fraternities may be this: Can you substantively improve a system that was poorly structured to start with, one in which the adults live far away from the students they supervise and 20-year-olds are in charge of daily operations? Add to that the sprawl of the fraternal system: 6,100 chapters, with an average of 45 students each, on 800 campuses. It's easy to see how a single chapter can spin out of control with little warning.

"It's a bad business model," says Bradley Cohen, former president of Sigma Alpha Epsilon, one of the country's largest fraternities. "Every four years you have a completely different set of employees, including your CEO and president."

Skeptics also question how much you can tinker

with the social structure of organizations rooted in traditionalism and group loyalty. Several studies have suggested that fraternity life limits students' exposure to people from diverse backgrounds.

"They come out in ways being more traditional, less challenged than when they started," says Alan D. DeSantis, who spent hundreds of hours talking to fraternity and sorority members for his 2007 book, *Inside Greek U.*

Yet college administrators caution against trying to do away with fraternities altogether, arguing that banning them could create a far worse alternative. "It's in everybody's best interest to have strong, viable national fraternities and sororities," says Mr. Kimbrough. "Students will still have the right to associate. They will create unsanctioned, underground groups, and that's going to be a nightmare for everyone."

SOME people may say that fraternities are facing an identity crisis, but that underplays how resilient and adaptive they have always been. They've existed since the time of the American Revolution, appeared in modern form in the early 1880s, survived the Civil War, and rode the waves



SUE OGROCKI, AP IMAGES

Levi Pettit (center), one of the members of the U. of Oklahoma's Sigma Alpha Epsilon chapter caught on tape singing a racist chant, publicly apologized in March during a news conference at Fairview Baptist Church, in Oklahoma City.

of social upheaval in the 1960s and '70s. They thrived in the 1980s, nearly collapsed under the weight of lawsuits in the 1990s, and returned, corporatized and professionalized, in the 2000s.

From their beginnings, fraternities have often operated in opposition to the colleges with which they were affiliated. Secretive and exclusionary, the groups have bothered faculty members and administrators since their earliest days. But at a time when college life was far more austere, offering little in the way of culture and social events, the first fraternities provided a welcome outlet for students, notes Nicholas L. Syrett, author of *The Company He Keeps: A History of White College Fraternities*.

The 20th-century fraternity has gone through many changes. In the 1950s and early '60s, their conservative values and traditions meshed well with the mood on college campuses, although as Mr. Syrett notes, they were also the source of a steady stream of racist and sexist behavior. In the tumultuous 1970s, their traditionalist views stood in increasingly stark contrast to the political shifts on campus.

Then came *Animal House*. The 1978 movie touched off a renaissance of sorts, fueled by more relaxed attitudes toward drinking and sex. When the drinking age was raised to 21, in 1984, off-campus fraternity parties became a staple of college life, and the Greek experience changed profoundly. A landmark study conducted in the early 1990s found that 86 percent of fraternity members engaged in binge drinking.

"Kegs, party balls, beer trucks with a dozen taps along the sides, kegerators, 55-gallon drums filled with a mixture of liquor and Kool-Aid, ad infinitum. 'Tradition' became a common theme for parties, ranging from 'tiger breakfasts' to 'heaven and hell,' with variations."

That reminiscence comes not from a nostalgic fraternity brother, but from the Fraternal Information & Programming Group, a risk-management organization formed in 1987 by national Greek leaders who watched what was happening inside fraternity houses with growing alarm. An increase in fires, serious injuries, and sexual assaults led, inevitably, to lawsuits. Phi Kappa Sigma, for one, estimated that it handled 41 claims from 1990 to 2000, paying out \$3.5 million, including more than \$1 million for a house fire at the University of California at Berkeley that led to three deaths. Insurance companies began dropping fraternities, and insurance costs rose rapidly.

Fraternities' relationship with colleges, never easy, became more fraught. "What you had was a divorce," says Peter F. Lake, a professor at Stetson University College of Law who specializes in higher-education law and policy. "And alcohol broke up the marriage."

Whether because of internal disorganization, crackdowns by colleges, or their tainted public im-

age, fraternities began losing their appeal in the late 1990s. By one estimate, 50,000 fewer students were members at the end of the decade than at the beginning.

"Fraternities were hemorrhaging from all angles in terms of academics, recruitment, risk management, housing infrastructure, alumni involvement, institutional support, public relations, etc.," Beta Theta Pi writes on its website. "To suggest the

"Right now what we're seeing is grass-roots groups trying to change culture within Greek life."

whole fraternal community was in a state of disrepair would be a gross understatement. Disarray was more like it, and Beta Theta Pi, in many respects, was no exception."

It was also one of several fraternities that tried to turn the tide by creating programming and policies that emphasized academics and character building. National groups like the interfraternity conference adopted or updated policies that explicitly banned hazing and stressed high academic standards and leadership development. Many fraternities required students to follow the guidelines outlined by the national risk-management group.

Sigma Phi Epsilon banned pledging and created the Balanced Man Program, to provide a structured plan for personal development. Phi Delta Theta declared it would become alcohol-free. Pi Kappa Sigma went substance-free. And Beta Theta Pi started Men of Principle, which, among other things, banned hazing and alcohol in recruitment.

TO DAY, more than 15 years after fraternities and their national affiliates began rewriting their rule books, there are signs of progress. Hazing, now illegal in 44 states, is far less of a problem than it used to be, and raucous open-keg parties are also largely a thing of the past, according to college administrators and fraternity officials. Many fraternities require members to take workshops about alcohol and sexual assault, training that has ramped up significantly in recent

years. Five fraternities within the interfraternity conference have banned pledging. National leaders now talk about being in the business of men's development, in which fraternities are living-learning communities.

All of these efforts have put fraternities on the leading edge of fighting risky behaviors, says Peter Smithhisler, president of the North-American Interfraternity Conference.

But frat-house culture is resilient. "The expectation for being Greek is so distorted that it's affecting decisions and it's affecting the culture of memberships, of chapters, and maybe even college campuses," says Brian C. Warren Jr., chief executive of Sigma Phi Epsilon.

Researchers continue to ask whether fraternities breed troublemakers, even as they produce students engaged in campus life.

"The studies are consistent about certain things: alcohol use and abuse, sexual violence and hazing," says Steve Veldkamp, executive director of the Center for the Study of the College Fraternity and assistant dean of students at Indiana University at Bloomington. "They're not only found in fraternities and sororities, but absolutely found there to a higher degree."

A commonly cited study from 2007 found that men in fraternities were three times more likely than other college men to commit rape. A more-recent study, of campus sexual-assault claims from 2011 to 2013, found a different issue. About one-quarter of repeat offenders were fraternity members, even though they make up only 9 percent of students.

"The biggest problem in Greek life is not that everyone in Greek life is a potential perpetrator, but that we create a culture in which perpetrators feel comfortable in our organizations," says Matthew Leibowitz, a fraternity alumnus and executive director of Consent Is So Frat, an educational group focused on sexual-assault prevention.

One of the largest studies of the impact of fraternity and sorority membership, which examined surveys of 100,000 students from 400 institutions, concluded that Greek life may have less influence on behavior than previously thought. But that's largely because Greek organizations draw students who already drank more heavily and were more socially engaged than their peers in high school. In other words, fraternities may not produce socially active, hard-partying members so much as attract them.

Mr. DeSantis, author of *Inside Greek U.* and a communications professor at the University of Kentucky, says defending the Greek system has become harder as the years go by. He formed lasting friendships with his fraternity brothers, he says, and has long believed in the positive value of Greek life. But he has had to reckon with the negative forces within it, including a tendency toward anti-

intellectualism and gender stereotyping. "These groups aren't just conservative," he says. "They're hyperconservative."

Fraternities that shun the frat-boy image, he says, are typically the outliers. And he doesn't buy the argument that fraternities prepare future leaders. "Look at the group you're drawing from," he says. "These kids were born on third base."

This past year he got involved in the development of a living-learning community on campus with a diverse group of students: wealthy and poor, rural and urban, Muslim and Christian. Weekly group discussion on complex topics, like relations between Israel and Palestine, were guided by him and another professor. By the end of the year, the students had not only formed tight bonds, he says, they changed each other's lives.

"I see that and I think *that's* the idea," says Mr. DeSantis.

As Mr. DeSantis's experience suggests, college life may be eclipsing fraternities. "If you go back 50 years, fraternities and sororities provided much more developmental experience than most campuses provided," says Mr. Koepsell, of the Greek advisers association. "Campuses took that model and implemented it. Probably most people would argue that residential life is better than most fraternities and sororities today."

"The expectation for being Greek is so distorted that it's affecting decisions and it's affecting the culture."

Sororities may have a better case to make than fraternities about the quality of the residential life they offer. Their chapters are alcohol free and often have a full-time, live-in director. Unlike with fraternities, several studies have shown that sorority members often have higher grades than their non-Greek peers.

FRATERNITIES and colleges today operate in parallel, each trying to shore up the Greek system in its own way. The result is a patchwork of strategies, offering some clues but no big answers, as to how to improve the fraternity experience.



PAUL A. SOUTERS, CORBIS

In 1995, U. of Maryland students gathered on the lawn of Zeta Beta Tau to see a band play. The early '90s marked a high point in fraternity membership nationwide.

Some fraternities are trying to develop the kind of living-learning community that Mr. DeSantis experienced. They are revising recruitment procedures, adding educational and service opportunities, and, in some cases, hiring house directors.

Over the past eight years, Delta Upsilon has closed 25 percent of its chapters for poor performance, including weak academics and risky behavior, then opened about an equal number of new ones under the close supervision of the national organization, says its executive director, Justin Kirk. The goal, he says, has been to recruit better-quality members and provide a stronger educational experience.

"You can either be about better experience or be about growing," he says of the differences he's noticed among the national fraternities. "Where you spend your money says what you prioritize."

Colleges have also taken distinct approaches to Greek life: push away or pull close. Under the advice of their lawyers, some institutions have decided they'd rather keep the Greek system at a distance.

Other colleges have bucked that trend. At Lehigh University, where 40 percent of students are Greek, all fraternities and sororities must be ac-

credited by the college, using measures including evidence of intellectual development and good facilities management. "I'm more comfortable knowing we've done all that we've done, rather than keeping fraternities at arm's length and keeping our fingers crossed," says John W. Smeaton, vice provost for student affairs.

The University of Maryland runs an eight-person Greek-life office, one of the largest in the country. Headed by Matthew L. Supple, who has worked in Greek life for more than 20 years, the department requires Greek chapters to participate in leadership and educational programming. The university owns 21 of 34 Greek houses and requires a live-in house director for any chapter with more than 15 members.

While problems still regularly occur, says Mr. Supple, strong relationships with the Greek community have helped Maryland respond quickly and cultivate self-policing.

Still, he's aware of how slippery the university's hold is on Greek life. His office's website lists seven chapters that have had their recognition removed and their national charters suspended but continue operating underground.

Some institutions are reworking the financial

equation by developing Greek villages, in which the college owns the land and sometimes the buildings and uses the income to finance further support of Greek life. At the University of South Carolina, each of the 20 houses in the Greek Village has a live-in director. Students are billed for room and board, which supports this infrastructure. Their fees also go toward maintenance, a perennial problem with off-campus fraternity houses everywhere.

But most colleges do not have large budgets set aside for Greek life. Mr. Koepsell says it's a matter of economics. Dorm fees build in the cost of staffing and programming. "In fraternity and sorority

life, where is the income coming in to support that level of staffing?" he asks. "They're independent living structures outside of the community."

Meanwhile, national fraternities are trying to come up with ideas that could be applied everywhere, through their commissions on hazing, sexual assault, and alcohol. Those reports are due in March.

Commission heads say the problems they are trying to tackle are not confined to fraternity houses, making it tricky to devise solutions.

Edward H. Hammond is president emeritus of Fort Hays State University and chair of the alco-

Timeline: Fraternities Through History



GEORGE SKADDING, THE LIFE PICTURE COLLECTION, GETTY IMAGES

Members of Sigma Chi gathered for a “bull session” at Northwestern U. in 1949

1776:

The first Greek letter organization, Phi Beta Kappa, is founded at the College of William & Mary.

1825:

The first modern fraternity, Kappa Alpha Society, is formed at Union College. Its membership is composed entirely of students, and its members are bound by secret rituals.

1861:

By the beginning of the Civil War, fraternities have spread across higher education. Twenty-two fraternities have 299 chapters at 71 colleges in 25 states.

1873:

Mortimer Leggett, a student at Cornell University, dies from a steep fall during an initiation ritual. His becomes the first widely reported hazing death of a fraternity member.

1943-44:

During World War II, an estimated 40 percent of fraternity chapters close.

1960s:

Baby Boomers flood campuses, and more fraternity chapters are formed than in any other decade since the 1920s. Still, in 1970, only 4.8 percent of undergraduate men are fraternity members. Studies from the time show they tend to be more economically and socially conservative than their classmates.

1978:

The movie *Animal House* is released, based on the experiences of former fraternity members from Dartmouth and other colleges. It fuels a resurgence in fraternity life.

1987:

National Greek leaders, alarmed by increases in fires, serious injuries, and sexual assaults, which in turn led to a growing number of lawsuits, form a risk-management group and lay out national guidelines.

1990:

Fraternity membership reaches a record 400,000 students.

1993:

A national student survey estimates that 86 percent of fraternity members engage in binge drinking.

1997:

Phi Delta Theta becomes the first national fraternity to ban alcohol in its houses.

2000:

Fraternity membership falls to 350,000 following a decade of troubling behavior. The North-American Interfraternity Conference rolls out "Values in Action," one of several efforts to refocus Greek life on academics and leadership.

2013:

Fraternity membership rebounds to 388,000 students.

2014:

To respond to continuing problems, the conference announces the creation of three commissions to devise solutions to the problems of alcohol abuse, sexual assault, and hazing in Greek life.

SOURCES: "THE COMPANY HE KEEPS: A HISTORY OF WHITE COLLEGE FRATERNITIES," BY NICHOLAS L. SYRETT; CHRONICLE REPORTING

hol commission. His group expects to turn in draft recommendations this summer. On the table is the possibility of making every fraternity alcohol-free. It's an idea that makes sense to Mr. Hammond. "The vast majority of undergraduates in our fraternity houses are not of legal age," he says. "The campuses, basically, their housing is alcohol-free. So it would be a consistent message."

Alcohol-free chapters have students with higher grades, fewer problematic behaviors, and lower insurance costs, he says. But for the idea to work, everyone would have to move in the same direction. "If some are not doing it, it's going to be a lot harder to pull off."

Among the campuses Mr. Hammond's commission studied was Colorado State University, whose Greek system went dry following the alcohol-poisoning death of a female student at a fraternity house in 2004. Banning alcohol in housing worked, says Jody Donovan, assistant vice president for student affairs, because it was part of a broader, student-supported effort to limit access to alcohol. "Nobody pointed fingers at one another, which is really significant," she says.

In other areas, students may be the drivers of change. Some Greek student activists took their national leaders to task this spring after members of the Fraternal Government Relations Coalition suggested that colleges should hold off on sexu-

al-assault investigations until cases worked their way through the legal system. The national leaders seemed more concerned about the treatment of alleged perpetrators than the care of assault victims, students said.

"We're doing all of this work to educate our students, but that leaves the older generation out of the conversation," says Julia K. Dixon, a sorority alumna who works with Promoting Awareness, Victim Empowerment, a nonprofit group. "Right now what we're seeing is grass-roots groups trying to change culture within Greek life."

Another glimpse of the future may be found in historically white fraternities in the West and parts of the South. There, in states like California, Texas, and Florida, chapters are more ethnically and racially diverse than those in Indiana or Mississippi, says Christianne I. Medrano, associate director for fraternity and sorority life at Florida International University.

Her university is majority Latino, she notes, and so are the fraternity and sorority chapters. Her colleagues at historically white Greek organizations are "very much pushing for diversity," says Ms. Medrano, who is former head of the National Multicultural Greek Council. "But you're combating 400 years of embedded history in this country. You can make change, but it will be gradual change that will take a long time."

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The Death of Tucker Hipps

How the mystery of a pledge's plunge from a bridge highlights fraternities' fatal flaws

By DAN BERRETT



COURTESY OF HIPPS FAMILY

Tucker Hipps died in September 2014.

THE FRATERNITY pledges gathered for a run before dawn.

In single file, led by three brothers, the 27 pledges set out for about two miles, turning onto Old Greenville Highway, crossing the bridge over Lake Hartwell and back.

One of them, Tucker Hipps, never returned.

The sophomore's body was found that afternoon, floating under the bridge. He died from blunt-force trauma to his face, palms, and chest — the result of a head-first fall from 20 feet, according to the coroner. A toxicology report turned up no alcohol or drugs in his system.

His fellow runners, all students at Clemson University, haven't offered a clear explanation of what

happened on that day last September. Local police have interviewed 50 people, including everyone on the run that day, and concluded that some of them have been withholding information or lying. Either that, the Oconee County sheriff told the local news, "or we've got the greatest mystery in the world." The case is now in the hands of an unsolved-crimes investigator.

Tucker's parents, Gary and Cindy Hipps, allege in a pair of lawsuits that a pattern of hazing climaxed in a confrontation between Tucker and a fraternity member on the bridge.

The circumstances of Tucker's death, to the extent that they're known, evoke broader tensions that confound many universities, national fraternities, parents, and their children: how to promote a culture of responsibility while reducing risk,

how to encourage a basic desire to belong while guarding against coercion. The Hipps's claims also paint a picture of a toxic mix of forces — self-governance, secrecy, and the lure of tradition — that allow dangerous behavior to persist at fraternities and draw undergraduates like Tucker to them in the first place.

Self-governance, a bedrock notion for fraternities, has long been credited with endowing the experience with its developmental power. It gives young men the space to assert their independence and, crucially, to hold one another accountable. No pledge would say self-governance is what attracted him to fraternity life, but it is that concept that grants these organizations their unusually wide latitude on campus and, ultimately, their ability to sell themselves as hives for alcohol, parties, and sex.

Fraternities also tap into something deep, almost atavistic, for some people. Bound in tradition and secrecy, offering power and connection, fraternities draw young men who crave belonging and ritual a way to come of age.

Tucker's parents maintain that both individuals and institutions let their son down. They have sued three fraternity brothers, the local chapter and national office of Sigma Phi Epsilon, and Clemson, all of whom have denied many of the assertions made. Most are seeking to have the case dismissed.

His parents wish that what happened to Tucker was an anomaly, but they believe it is not. His death was one of at least four fraternity-related fatalities nationwide this past academic year. At least one hazing-related death has occurred in the Greek system each year since 1970, according to Hank Nuwer, an expert on the topic.

"If you have youth, autonomy, and misguided allegiance," Mr. Hipps says, "that combination is a tragedy waiting to happen."

JOINING a fraternity held a powerful appeal for Tucker Hipps.

His plans to rush surprised his father, who had never joined the Greek system. What, he thought, did his son need a fraternity for? Tucker already had plenty of friends from home; he grew up half an hour away from campus. His high-school sweetheart was also at Clemson, so he didn't need help meeting women.

His parents were also worried about money. They had budgeted for four years of college and thought that fraternity activities might push him off track.

But Tucker loved feeling a sense of brotherhood. He thrived at Palmetto Boys State, a leadership program run by the American Legion, which he attended as a camper and counselor over three summers. His penchant for hugs and his infectious smile stuck in people's minds there. So did his leadership skills.

Tucker pushed back against his father's doubts. He told him that a fraternity could help him with contacts for a job. The Greek system claimed about one in four students at Clemson, and Tucker saw fraternities as the locus of social life. He rushed Sigma Phi Epsilon, his first choice.

One Thursday night in September, Tucker's parents treated him, his girlfriend, and his roommate to dinner at Pixie and Bill's, a steak-and-seafood house. Tucker's mother asked him if the news she'd heard from a friend was true: Was he really pledge president?

He was, he told them, even though he didn't seek the office. The news heightened Mr. Hipps's concern that the fraternity was becoming all-engrossing. His son's role seemed to make him a gofer and dispatcher who was constantly on call. During dinner, Tucker was peppered with messages from the fraternity; in two hours, he received four texts and a phone call, and tracked 15 posts on a group messaging app.

After Tucker's death, his parents read the messages. Mr. and Ms. Hipps allege that Tucker and other pledges had to clean, move furniture, pick up food, mow grass, run errands, and ferry fraternity brothers around campus. Clemson found a similar pattern of servitude, which violates its hazing policy, and which the fraternity brothers deny. No one disputes that the pledges had to keep "pledge packs," which included condoms, cigarettes, and chewing tobacco, in their cars for the brothers.

Tucker's father had already warned the young man not to burn all his spending money on gas to drive fraternity members around in his truck. But Tucker hoped he wouldn't have to be their lackey for much longer. He was sure to get inducted soon.

As they left the restaurant, Tucker's parents hugged him and told him they loved him. It was the last time they would see him alive.

COLLEGES often have complicated relationships with their fraternities, sometimes holding them close, other times keeping their distance.

Clemson is no different. Publicly, it peddles a positive picture of Greek life. The university's website plays up the pluses: making lifelong friends, serving the community, and developing leadership potential. The negative portrayals of Greek life in the media, it assures parents, are stereotypes, the result of incomplete information. The university also offers parents a presentation during summer orientation. "It's intended to be a frank discussion," said Cathy Sams, Clemson's chief public-affairs officer. Tucker's parents say they heard how students in the Greek system excel academically and develop great time-management skills. Ms. Hipps left the session thinking that there would be strong oversight.

But in private last fall, Clemson's administrators expressed a growing sense of alarm as fraternities' behavior grew more unruly.

"There have been unprecedented conduct issues over the course of the first three weeks of school," Gail DiSabatino, then the vice president of student affairs, wrote to James P. Clements, Clemson's president. There had been 15 complaints about fraternities from parents and students during the first month of the semester: Five involved hazing, three sexual misconduct, and seven alcohol abuse.

Ms. DiSabatino outlined her plan: Impose a three-week moratorium on all social activities at fraternities. Require the Interfraternity Council to present a safety and risk-management plan. Shorten the number of weeks dedicated to new-member initiation. "We hope," she wrote on a Saturday in September, "that this shortened period will reduce the likelihood of hazing activities."

Mr. Clements responded the next afternoon, according to emails obtained through an open-records request. The president said he shared her concerns. He told Ms. DiSabatino the university's response to the conduct issues should "be proportionate to the problem, being mindful that the safety of our students is of paramount concern." The details of Clemson's actions, the president said, would be up to her.

On Sunday night, Ms. DiSabatino updated the president on her revised plans. The Interfraternity Council's response to Clemson's concerns — suspending parties that weekend — and the lack of problems during that time had persuaded her to back off of the moratorium. She hoped it would mean, she wrote, "little to no media attention or community angst."

The next morning, Tucker died.

Afterward, Clemson suspended the activities of its 24 fraternities. Many members chafed at being punished as a group for what seemed like the poor choices of a few. Some members of the Greek community said that Ms. DiSabatino overreacted. In early December, Mr. Clements dismissed her.

"The issues impacting your effectiveness are beyond rehabilitation," he wrote to her in a letter that was later published in local media. It stood in stark contrast to her last formal evaluation, the year before, by Mr. Clements's predecessor. "Clemson is a better place because of Gail DiSabatino," James F. Barker wrote in a letter that *The Chronicle* acquired via an open-records request. Ms. DiSabatino declined to be interviewed for this article, citing her departure agreement.

Clemson has also declined, through its media office, to talk about the particulars of the lawsuit, instead providing brief reports from its Office of Community and Ethical Standards. In Clemson's legal filings, it says Ms. DiSabatino's dismissal was not related to Tucker's death.

At Clemson, as elsewhere, institutional oversight

of fraternities can be inadequate. Few universities dedicate more than a handful of staff members to Greek life, and those employees are often young and inexperienced, say student-advising experts. Clemson's Greek-life office is staffed by eight people, five of them graduate assistants, who serve

"If you have youth, autonomy, and misguided allegiance, that combination is a tragedy waiting to happen."

4,600 fraternity and sorority members. The size of Clemson's office is typical for universities of its size, experts say.

Colleges have little incentive to exert more authority over their Greek systems, says Scott D. Schneider, a former associate general counsel at Tulane University. Institutions can expose themselves to greater risk if they take an active role in monitoring Greek life. That's the lesson of an influential appeals-court ruling from 1999, which found that the University of Idaho had to live up to a higher standard of responsibility because it stationed two Greek-life employees at a fraternity party. A young woman who got drunk at that party later plummeted from a third-floor fire escape and sustained permanent injuries.

There are also practical considerations, Mr. Schneider said. It's unrealistic, he said, to expect a college to be able to fully protect students from themselves.

"Let's say I hire 100 people to police Greek life," he said. "Is that going to stop these sorts of incidents from taking place? My intuition says it's not."

Since Tucker's death, Clemson has announced that it is stepping up its oversight. A report released in July described an inconsistent culture of accountability among fraternities and a lack of trust between Clemson and its Greek organizations. The plan calls for more staffers and oversight; more training of chapter heads, members, and advisers; stronger disciplinary procedures; stricter sanctions for violations; and a requirement that security guards check IDs at parties. With these measures, the university aspires to change campus culture around alcohol and hazing.

"This is pretty significant for us," said Almeda Jacks, Ms. DiSabatino's replacement, after the report was made public, "certainly going beyond and above the national expectations and requirements."

Still, Clemson, like other universities, continues to be caught between its desires to promote the positive aspects of Greek life with its duties to warn of the problems. Click past the smiling faces of two sorority sisters on Clemson's Greek-life home page, and a link titled "Important News" brings readers to descriptions of enforcement actions taken against fraternity chapters. The blurbs reflect the scope of the investigations Clemson has conducted of its student-conduct code violations. They are written in bureaucratese. Sigma Phi Epsilon, it's explained, was suspended for five years for violating regulations related to "alcohol, hazing, harm to person, failure to comply with official request, disruption of community and ethical standards, and student organization conduct."

You wouldn't know a student had died.

An arm's-length relationship can also characterize national fraternities' oversight of their chapters. This is true of Sigma Phi Epsilon, even though it has built a reputation among fraternities as one of the reformers.

After a rash of bad publicity in the 1990s, Sigma Phi Epsilon created the Balanced Man Program, a curriculum of presentations, readings, discussions, and other activities intended to help its members make the transition to college, socially, physically, and academically, and to continue developing.

It also banned traditional pledging, creating a single tier of membership instead of the customary two: member and pledge. "Generally the concept of two-tiered membership is only going to lead to one place," Brian C. Warren Jr., the national office's chief executive, said in an interview. "And that's hazing."

But its national policies have not applied everywhere. The Balanced Man Program has been optional for chapters, although that might change. Clemson was one of the 16 chapters, out of Sigma Phi Epsilon's 228, that didn't adopt the program. The Clemson chapter also continued to treat new members as pledges.

Mr. Warren said the national office had grown increasingly concerned about Clemson's chapter before Tucker's death. His staff paid it more attention than was customary, visiting at least four times a year and calling and emailing. Knowing the culture in place at Clemson, Mr. Warren said, the national office tried to encourage an approach to recruiting and accountability that was more in line with the Balanced Man Program.

After Clemson concluded an investigation into Tucker's death, Sigma Phi Epsilon withdrew the university's charter. In his letter announcing the decision, Mr. Warren noted that many members'

text messages around the time of the fatal run showed that several brothers had violated fraternity and university policy. Some of them had also, he added, provided false information to Clemson's staff during their investigation. He counseled them not to bother appealing the university's decision to kick them off campus.

How did the relationship fray so badly? Part of the explanation is the assumption of independence that underlies the corporate structure of most fraternities. A Sigma Phi Epsilon chapter is an unincorporated association that exists under a charter granted by the national organization. "The undergraduate chapter is responsible for all aspects of its own existence," the preamble to its bylaws reads.

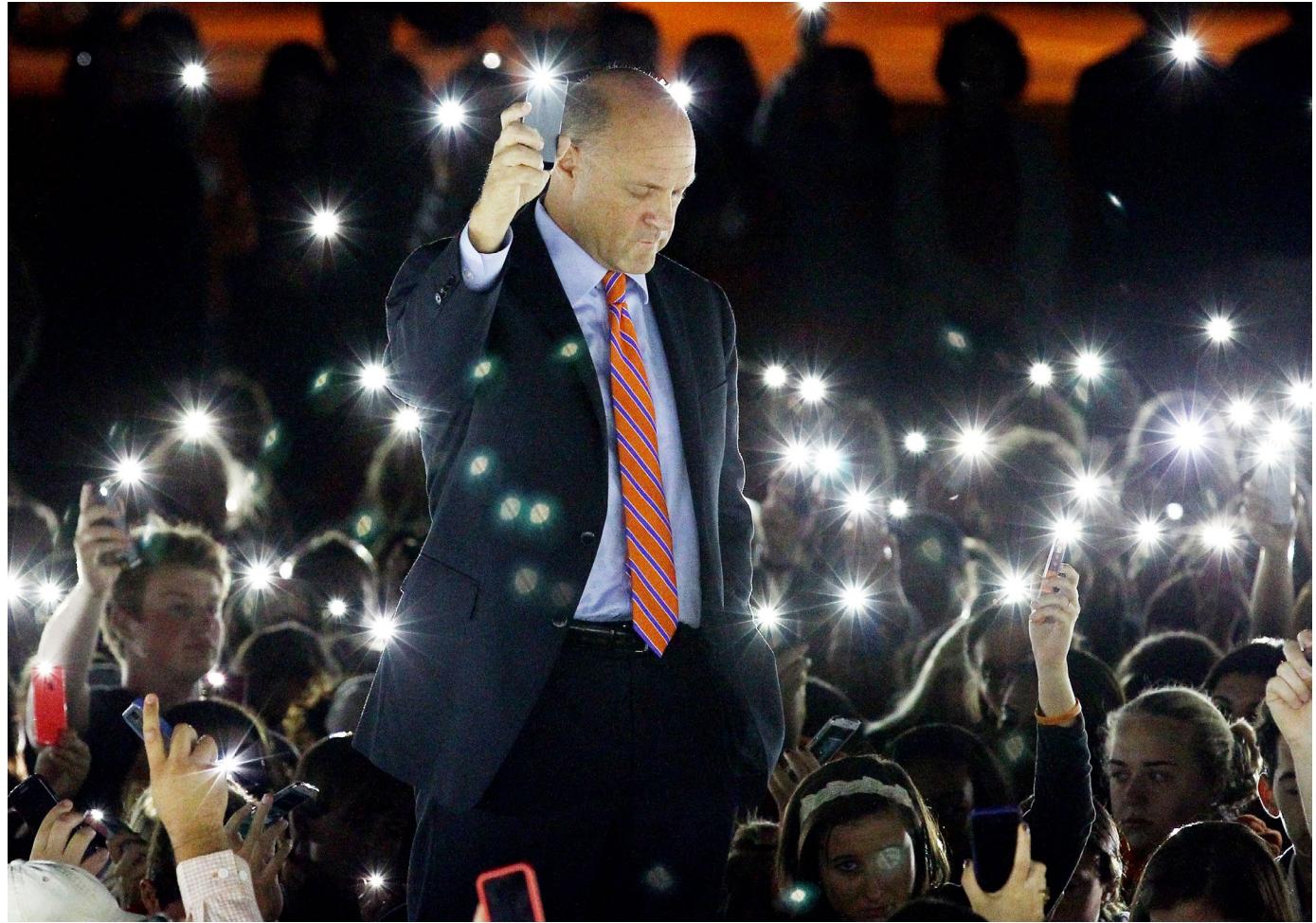
This arrangement grows out of fraternities' historical culture of self-governance and the expectation that young men will hold one another accountable. A national office with, say, 15,000 active members, like Sigma Phi Epsilon, can only monitor so much, say lawyers for fraternities.

And so the relationship between campus chapters and the national office can seem tenuous and a bit transactional. Local chapters of Sigma Phi Epsilon paid some \$5 million in dues in 2012 to the national office, according to its most recent Form 990, the financial disclosure that nonprofit groups file with the Internal Revenue Service. In return, the members tap into a national network of fellow brothers and attend the national office's conferences and trainings.

The members must safeguard the group's secrets

While South Carolina law defines hazing in purely physical terms, hazing often operates on a psychological level.

and rituals, which bind them to one another and to their history. Sigma Phi Epsilon's bylaws state that a member can be disciplined for "causing to be written or printed, or revealing in any manner whatsoever, any of the secret work of the fraternity." And if the local fraternity's members are found to haze or do something to embarrass the organization, their charter is yanked.



NATHAN GRAY, ANDERSON INDEPENDENT MAIL, AP IMAGES

James Clements, president of Clemson U., leads a moment of silence during a vigil for Tucker Hipps last September.

The notion of self-governance may need to be rethought, says Gentry McCreary, chief executive of Dyad Strategies, a research and assessment firm that helps fraternities and sororities develop anti-hazing, ethical-reasoning, and sexual-assault programs.

Over the last two decades, he says, students have changed. Many of them were raised by helicopter parents and arrive on campus with little experience solving conflicts. Compared with previous generations, research has shown, today's undergraduates exhibit lower levels of moral development and empathy. Students, Mr. McCreary argues, are also more narcissistic and have less experience holding their peers accountable. And without accountability, he says, self-governance is "a really tall order."

WITH universities and national fraternities often on the periphery, power at each fraternity house devolves to young men.

In the hours before the run at Clemson, Tucker received a slew of phone calls and text messages, his parents' lawsuit alleges. He was told to bring

30 McDonald's biscuits, 30 orders of hash browns, and two gallons of chocolate milk to the fraternity dormitory that morning. Tucker texted back, saying he didn't have the money.

They met at about 5:30 a.m., dressed in dark clothing so they wouldn't be seen. Clemson's policies forbid fraternities from holding new-member events before 7 a.m.

On the run, Tucker fell to the back of the group. Behind him was Thomas King, a full-fledged member, who hung back, the lawsuit says, to make sure no one fell behind. The group approached a bridge, one of two parallel two-lane spans that cross Lake Hartwell. Mr. King received a phone call. It was a fellow member, back at the dorm, who was "pissed off," the lawsuit alleges. Tucker had failed to provide breakfast.

Mr. King confronted Tucker when they were on the bridge, according to the parents' lawsuit, a claim Mr. King denies. "Subsequently," the parents' lawsuit continues, "Tucker went over the railing of the bridge into the shallow waters of Lake Hartwell head first."

Tucker went over. How, or why, remains unclear.

The Hippses, in their lawsuit, suggest one explanation: Sigma Phi Epsilon's local chapter carried on a tradition of "requiring, pressuring, encouraging, and forcing" pledges to leap off bridges over Lake Hartwell and swim to shore.

The fraternity members deny this assertion. Campbell T. Starr, one of three fraternity members who participated in the run and are now defendants, said he had never jumped off the bridges over the lake during any chapter event nor had he seen anyone else do it. His lawyer did not respond to a request for comment.

The runners returned home and ate breakfast. After Tucker failed to show up, some of them started making calls to find out where he was, his parents' lawsuit says. A few drove around looking for him. One of them texted Tucker's girlfriend to reassure her that he had been seen in the library.

After 1 p.m., they called campus police to report him missing. His body was found two hours later.

Several of the defendants blame Tucker for his own demise. His death, the fraternity wrote in its response to the lawsuit, was due to him "voluntarily jumping into the water." In their responses, two of the fraternity brothers also said Tucker's "negligence," "recklessness," and "willfulness and wantonness" caused his death. No one spelled out why he might have chosen to jump from the bridge.

THE argument that a pledge caused his own death is a common defense in such cases, say legal experts. It is increasingly discordant, though, with an evolving view of hazing that considers it a form of interpersonal violence, like bullying and sexual assault, where lines of consent and coercion can quickly get muddy.

While South Carolina law defines hazing in purely physical terms, hazing often operates on a psychological level. Belittling, humiliation, and being ordered around by someone more powerful than you — especially someone whose approval you're seeking — can undermine a person's autonomy. When such dynamics are in effect, how much consent can there truly be?

About half of the 44 states with anti-hazing laws include mental harm in their definitions. Florida, which has one of the most-stringent laws in the country, lists examples of mental hazing in its statute: sleep deprivation, exclusion from social contact, extreme embarrassment, forcing someone to do something that compromises their mental health or dignity. Arguing that the victim consented, Florida says, is no defense.

Among fraternity men, 81 percent said they had been hazed, according to research by Elizabeth J.

Allan, a professor of higher education at the University of Maine at Orono. But people who have been hazed are far more likely to frame their experience as positive than negative. Ms. Allan found that 31 percent said being hazed made them feel more like a part of their group; 22 percent said it led to a feeling of accomplishment. Only 11 percent said it made them feel stressed.

Or they simply grit their teeth and take it, hoping their endurance will prove their worth. Tucker's parents remember him as being choosy about his friends, but they think something changed when he started rushing. "He wanted to be a part of this system so bad," Mr. Hipps says, "that he was willing to turn off some of his alarms."

Research on hazing is still emerging, but some lessons are becoming clear. Legislating against specific acts is unlikely to fix the problem, Ms. Allan says. For example, when some colleges banned alcohol, pledges still died, as happened at California State University at Chico and the State University of New York at Plattsburgh. The problem wasn't booze. The pledges drank too much water.

"It's not about the 'what'; it's about the 'how,'" she said. "It's all about power, ultimately."

ABILLBOARD near Clemson's campus offers a reward for tips about what happened to Tucker. Gary and Cindy Hipps have been trying to find meaning in the death of their only child. They lean on their faith to cope with their heartbreak.

They hope their son's death will lead to changes at Clemson, fraternities, and beyond: more oversight, tort reform to allow larger damages from state institutions, stronger anti-hazing laws. They worry that, under the systems in place, what happened to Tucker will befall someone else. "It's more," Mr. Hipps said, "than whoever was on the bridge that day."

Mr. Hipps keeps his son's memory alive through social media. He sometimes posts Tucker's old tweets and responds to them, keeping up a conversation with his dead son.

Tucker's parents invoke his example as they grapple with how they should act. They imagine that Tucker would forgive the brothers who were on the bridge that day for whatever might have happened.

They like to think they would do the same if they had the chance. But no one has come forward. There is no one to forgive.

Update: The parents of Tucker Hipps settled their consolidated lawsuit against Clemson, Sigma Phi Epsilon, and other defendants in 2017.

Originally published on August 3, 2015

Members of Alpha Delta Phi at Cornell U. participate in a camping trip. As the university has taken more control over fraternities' practices, activities like this are meant to replace more-dangerous pledging traditions.



CORNELL U.

Colleges Confront the Perils of Frats

By KATHERINE MANGAN

PUZZLE NIGHT for new members was presented by Alpha Sigma Phi at the University of Arizona as a bonding experience, a wholesome alternative to the brutal ordeals that define this rite of passage for so many fraternity pledges.

Arizona is widely seen as a leader in combating hazing. As part of a national consortium, the university worked with StopHazing for three years on prevention, adopting strategies like encouraging team building and challenging the power dynam-

ics that can lead to abusive behavior. Out of those discussions, Alpha Sigma Phi proposed puzzle night.

But the event, in March, took a dangerous turn when members pressured pledges to get drunk, blindfolded them, and marched them down a hallway, where one was reportedly shoved into a pillar and seriously injured. Members threatened retaliation for telling anyone what happened, pledges said, but word got out, the university investigated, and it revoked the chapter's status as a recognized

campus group for at least a year. Meanwhile, the chapter can continue to recruit new members and hold social events because it is still recognized by the national fraternity and has its own house.

So how can colleges keep students safe? For all the efforts to rein in fraternities, problems associated with recruitment and initiation seem intractable nationally. At least one student dies from hazing every year, according to Hank Nuwer, a professor of journalism at Franklin College who has studied the issue. Hazing is by no means restricted to fraternities, but the combination of free-flowing alcohol, an unequal power dynamic between members and pledges, and decades of tradition can create breeding grounds for abuse. With each tragedy — this year the death of 19-year-old Timothy Piazza at Pennsylvania State University — comes new pressure to do more to prevent similar crises.

Some colleges that kept fraternities at arm's length now assert greater control over them, requiring students to attend safety workshops and chapters to submit detailed orientation plans. Others are pursuing a more bottom-up approach, encouraging fraternities to develop their own solutions or face heavy sanctions for infractions.

Change has been slow, in part because of the entrenched interests of tradition-bound alumni. But bringing problems out into the open and promoting confidential reporting have helped lift the veil of secrecy that perpetuates abusive behavior.

Success is hard to gauge, but campus officials report some progress, whether signaled by increased reporting, greater traction of alternative activities, or students' challenging the psychology of hazing. Following are some of the latest strategies that Greek-life leaders, student-affairs officers, fraternity members, and anti-hazing activists have identified to make fraternities safer.

Change the structure of the recruitment and initiation process.

The rush period, when students and fraternities try to impress each other, often with heavy drinking, is a blur of barbecues and mixers that may start before the fall semester. Houses then offer bids, and the students who accept them become pledges. It's during the pledging process, which lasts until the new members are formally initiated into the fraternity, that hazing is most likely to occur. It may involve seemingly harmless stunts and escalate to forced drinking, sleep deprivation, beatings, and real or simulated sex acts.

To limit opportunities for dangerous behavior, more colleges and fraternities are altering or compressing that timeline, delaying rush and eliminating pledging.

Postponing rush until late fall or even early spring, as Vanderbilt, George Washington, and Penn State Universities now do, "is the big current

reform being talked about," says Mr. Nuwer. The argument for waiting is that students are more settled, have established friendships, and are less likely to feel pressured into risk taking. (On the other hand, delaying recruitment can lead to a semester of hard partying as chapters woo potential members before rush officially begins.)

Starting this fall, George Washington will require students to complete at least 12 credit hours before they join a fraternity, despite complaints from some Greek leaders that the move was made without their input.

Colleges have also set their sights on pledging. At the University of South Carolina, reports of hazing and other abuses dropped this spring after the university threatened to ban pledging and closed or placed on probation more than a dozen chapters.

Some fraternities have compressed pledging on their own. Alpha Gamma Rho and Sigma Alpha Epsilon now initiate new members within a few days of signing bids.

Assert greater control over fraternity life.

Colleges are increasingly willing to challenge fraternities' history of self-governance by giving faculty advisers greater control over the groups and imposing strict limits on parties.

After Mr. Piazza's death, Penn State announced that it would no longer let Greek student leaders adjudicate misconduct cases and recommend sanctions, and it would more closely monitor social events. As Penn State was considering those moves, its president, Eric J. Barron, acknowledged in an open letter that "new rules can just be ignored" and bad behavior can go underground.

American University found that out the hard way when former members of a disbanded fraternity created the problem-plagued Epsilon Iota. Eighteen students were expelled last month for their involvement with that group 16 years after it was officially kicked off campus.

But top-down mandates can sometimes breed resentment. Student fraternity leaders at Penn State expressed their frustration with a "university-mandated" approach. They apologized to Mr. Piazza's family and recognized the problem of hazing, but said that solutions should involve students, pointing out the challenge of the university's having gone nearly two years without a full-time director of fraternity and sorority life. Adding to the difficulties of engaging students is that on many campuses, the office of Greek life is short-staffed, with young, inexperienced employees.

Another way for colleges to crack down is on the formidable problem of excessive alcohol consumption. Administrators have tried to mandate alcohol-free fraternities; they have allowed wayward chapters back on campus under restrictions; and fraternities have tried to ban liquor from their houses — all with limited success. Even when



ABBY DREY, CENTRE DAILY TIMES, AP IMAGES

Timothy Piazza died this year in a frat house at Penn State. Here, his parents attend a news conference about the investigation.

chapters start out with good intentions, those that decide or agree to restrict alcohol often end up succumbing to peer pressure to let it flow, says Gentry R. McCreary, a consultant with the Ncherm Group, which advises colleges on risk management.

But there are some signs of change. Following the death of a pledge, Tucker Hipps, in 2014, Clemson University required that all recruitment-related activities be alcohol-free and banned fraternities from buying alcohol for social events. Students were allowed to bring their own beer to parties. A Clemson spokesman said there have been fewer serious health and safety violations since the changes took effect.

Encourage team-building activities.

Lianne Kowiak, whose son, Harrison, died in 2008 while pledging a fraternity at Lenoir-Rhyne University, wants to see hazing replaced with the example of brotherhood the groups' advocates extol: "team-building activities where everyone is working alongside one another and giving back to the community."

Cornell University does this in part by linking Greek life to the outdoor recreation program, which helps plan ropes courses, for instance, and camping trips. The University of North Carolina at Charlotte encourages various team-building activi-

ties when it meets with fraternity leaders. The Phi Beta Sigma chapter there has brought new members to volunteer in a food bank and elementary school, says Byron Harris, a senior who's vice president of the chapter.

For members who came through a while back, he says, "we have to convince them that times have changed, and you don't have to break a brother down or belittle him" to gain his loyalty. While fraternities come up with some activities, staff members in Greek-life offices comb websites for team-building tips.

But as with puzzle night at Arizona, an activity that sounds safe enough can quickly devolve, especially when heavy drinking is involved. Scavenger hunts are popular, but one at Michigan State University last year veered into hazing when pledges were pressured to get a photo of a woman's breast bearing the chapter's Greek letters.

Improve bystander education for parents and students.

While hazing is often done at night, in secret, "many students report that they talk to their friends and families" about what they're going through, says Elizabeth J. Allan, a professor of higher education at the University of Maine who directs the national Hazing Prevention Consor-

tium that the University of Arizona belongs to. Colleges should provide more outreach to families, she says, so they're aware of the warning signs of hazing and whom to contact.

In a newsletter to parents, Arizona cautioned that no one should be demeaned or put in a potentially harmful situation to join a campus group. Worrisome signs, the newsletter said, would include a student's losing contact with friends or family, appearing dirty or unkempt, or his grades suddenly dropping.

Administrators have found that they need to reassure students that letting someone know about possible hazing is not only OK, but the right thing to do. Arizona warns students that if they suspect hazing, they must come forward: "You could be held responsible if things take a wrong turn." More campuses now have a confidential reporting process.

Students should be encouraged to share concerns with Greek-life advisers without worrying that a chapter will be shut down, says Mr. McCreary. Colleges can send that message through their response, he says: "We need to get them out of enforcement business and into advocacy and education."

Texas A&M University tries to alert students to what constitutes hazing by listing examples online,

like making someone dress up as a homeless person or forcing two men to make out. Getting students to recognize when behavior crosses the line often requires discussions about power dynamics and group bullying.

"A lot of universities are afraid to have those honest conversations and pull back the curtain, because they're afraid of what they'll see," says Michelle Guobadia, director of fraternity and sorority life at UNC-Charlotte.

Not only in reporting hazing, but also preventing it, parents make natural allies, she says. But that may mean pointing out that a student who abuses his classmates or steps over someone who has passed out was inclined to do that before college. "Parents need to have a conversation with students before they come," says Ms. Guobadia, who won an "anti-hazing hero award" this year from Hazing-Prevention.org.

She is encouraged by students' requests for alternative new-member activities and sees greater willingness to turn in those who refuse to follow the rules. She urges everyone with any connection to Greek life to keep challenging the idea that belittling or abusing someone builds bonds.

Hazing happens in secret, but the myths that perpetuate it sound pretty stupid, she says, when exposed to the light of day.

Originally published on August 30, 2017

In Loving Memory
George B Desdunes

February 25, 2011



*A faithful friend is a sturdy shelter;
he who finds one finds a treasure.*

*A faithful friend is beyond price,
no sum can balance his worth.*

*A faithful friend is a life-saving
remedy, such as he who fears God finds.*

Sirach 6:14~17

George Desdunes died in 2011 after a mock kidnapping at Cornell U., part of a pledge event for Sigma Alpha Epsilon. His mother holds his memorial card.

'How One University Is Challenging an Ugly 'Tradition' Among Students

By KATHERINE MANGAN

WHEN George Desdunes was found unresponsive on a February morning in 2011, a Sigma Alpha Epsilon pledge took action.

He instructed his roommate to throw out the zip ties and duct tape that had been bought to bind the wrists and ankles of fraternity elders like Mr. Desdunes, a sophomore at Cornell University, as pledges peppered them with SAE trivia and plied them with vodka. The first priority at that point was to hide the evidence.

Like other rituals, the mock kidnapping, meant as a fun form of reverse hazing, was supposed to remain secret. Instead, Mr. Desdunes's death shined a spotlight on the dangerous pranks and sometimes sadistic traditions that have claimed dozens of young lives nationally in recent decades.

Greek life remains a big draw at Cornell, where more than 4,500 students — roughly a third of the undergraduate student body — belong to one of 64 recognized fraternities or sororities. But in the past five years, the university has tried to lift the shroud of secrecy that allows hazing to continue.

The practice was banned at Cornell in 1980 but continued anyway during Greek organizations' initiation period. Administrators cracked down time and time again, but with Mr. Desdunes's death, David J. Skorton, the university's president at the time, had had enough.

Cornell kicked the SAE chapter off campus, and its national headquarters disbanded it. Beyond that, Mr. Skorton asked all fraternity leaders to suggest safe alternatives to pledging, said he wouldn't approve anything that encouraged dangerous behavior, and shared his message widely. "Demeaning activities that cause psychological harm and physical danger" have no place at Cornell, he said in *The New York Times*. He outlined a vision of students coming together in "socially productive, enjoyable and memorable ways ... com-

pletely free of personal degradation, disrespect, or harassment in any form."

Instead of a pledging period that can last several months, fraternities at Cornell now have a maximum of four weeks to orient new members (a compromise between mere days and a longer break-in time).

Chapters have to submit their new-member-orientation schedules to the university, as well as to the national fraternity and an alumni adviser, for review. Mock kidnappings don't fly; ropes courses or community-service activities do. Administrators make suggestions, and, if they learn that chapters have deviated from the plans, hold them responsible. Hazing violations are posted online.

Anyone who suspects hazing — in a fraternity or any other campus group — is encouraged to report it. Cornell's Student and Campus Life Office recently released a video in which a student confronts his roommate after he nods off in class, ditches a study session right before a test, and is summoned in the middle of the night. Together they file a confidential hazing report.

The video is part of a broader push to encourage bystander intervention. Reports from friends, parents, and others have led to punishments ranging from mandatory attendance at prevention courses to a chapter's loss of recognition by the university.

Gauging success in combating hazing, like sexual assault, is complicated. As awareness of the problem has increased at Cornell, so, too, have reports of potential violations. At the same time, though, in campus surveys, fewer students say they have been hazed.

Sam Turer, a senior who is executive vice president of Cornell's Interfraternity Council, took a six-week course called the Greek Leadership Academy, through the university's outdoor-education program. The voluntary one-credit course teaches

students how to change the mind-set on how new members should be treated.

"When people challenge us with, 'This is tradition,' it's easy for us to respond, 'No, your tradition isn't humiliating and hazing people,'" Mr. Turer says. Fraternities, he argues, were created to lift people up, not to belittle them. "When we describe the history, they get it."

Reducing hazing, Cornell has found, requires challenging the assumption that pledges are far beneath full members in the fraternity pecking order. "That power differential adds to the notion that you have to prove yourself — that you have to earn the right to be a member," says Kara S. Miller, director of sorority and fraternity life.

Sit-down discussions with small groups of fraternity members and a Greek-life adviser or visiting expert on what constitutes hazing, what it accomplishes, and what it doesn't accomplish have been helpful, says Timothy Marchell, director of the university's Skorton Center for Health Initiatives.

Students may say they're seeking cohesion and

solidarity, but often they haze because they went through it and want to see someone else suffer, Mr. Marchell says. "It's more about dominance and an abuse of power, or sometimes, a feeling of displaced revenge."

That's a heavy message to deliver to fraternity members who insist that their motives are honorable. Humor, he says, can soften the blow.

"Say you're interviewing for your first job after college and the interviewer says that solidarity and cohesion are important, because you'll be working in teams," he tells students in the small-group discussions. Would they say, "I think you should take your team to the basement of a dingy building and duct-tape them together and make them drink shots"?

No matter how many rules a college puts in place, the most effective approach to keeping students safe is to change mind-sets, people at Cornell believe. That means dispensing with euphemisms and exposing the ugly side of a tradition handed down for generations.

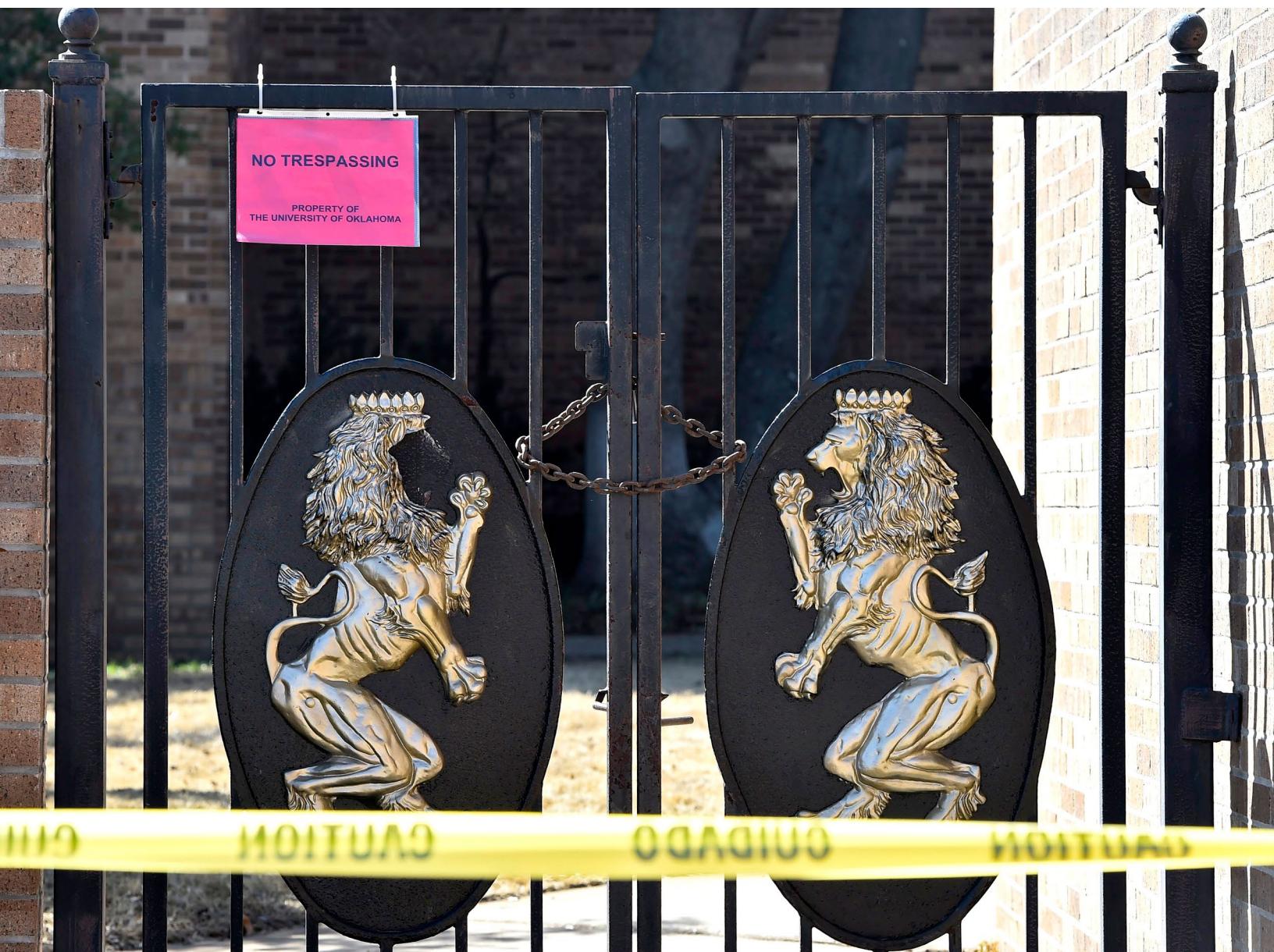
"It's never OK to humiliate or intimidate new members," say posters around campus. They point out that 87 percent of students agree.

Gauging success in combating hazing, like sexual assault, is complicated.

Originally published on August 30, 2017

Why Colleges Don't Do More to Rein In Frats

By ERIC KELDERMAN



LARRY W. SMITH, EPA, LANDOV

The gate at the Sigma Alpha Epsilon fraternity house at the U. of Oklahoma at Norman was locked after the institution closed the house and expelled some of its members for leading a racist chant.

IT'S getting hard to keep up with the number of shocking incidents attributed to fraternities.

As headlines pile up — racist and sexist speech, sexual impropriety, destruction of property, hazing, illegal drugs, and even the death of a student — there is a growing sense that Greek organizations are out of control.

As a result, some colleges have moved to close fraternities, suspend or expel student offenders, and — in cases of alleged criminal activity — open their own investigations.

But the latest spate of bad behavior has raised bigger questions about Greek organizations' place on campuses: Why don't colleges, or the national associations the fraternities represent, hold frats more accountable? Can they, or should they, do more? How?

Cracking down on fraternities faces big hurdles, such as upsetting powerful alumni and donors who were members of those groups. But some colleges and national associations have taken it upon themselves to limit their responsibilities chiefly because of the cost and potential legal liability.

"The greater control you set up for Greek life, the more liability you assume," says Scott Schneider, who leads the higher-education practice at a New Orleans law firm and is a former associate general counsel at Tulane University.

RULES, RULES, RULES

In some ways, at least, fraternities and sororities are already subject to lots of rules, many of them self-imposed, says Mark Koepsell, executive director of the Association of Fraternity/Sorority Advisors. "The bar is absolutely higher for Greek organizations," he says.

Those rules begin with the basic ones that apply to their peers. Individual members of Greek organizations are, of course, subject to student codes of conduct. And as chapters, fraternities and sororities usually must meet the same expectations as other student organizations, Mr. Koepsell says. In the meantime, they generally must also meet the standards of an umbrella group of Greek organizations on a campus.

"There's no doubt" that national Greek organizations want to protect students, says Emily N. Pualwan, executive director of HazingPrevention.org, a nonprofit group that works with both colleges and

Greek organizations. While reports of hazing are on the rise, she says, actual incidents are most likely decreasing. Training and prevention programs, she says, are simply making students more willing to report such behavior.

But national Greek organizations have not always hired enough staff members to monitor the number of chapters they have, Ms. Pualwan says.

The national organizations do have a clear oversight role: They set standards for the behavior of individual members, and they require local chapters to follow an extensive set of rules under risk-management policies that bar activity like the use of illegal drugs or the provision of alcohol to minors. Individual chapters must also purchase insurance through a company established by the fraternities and paid for by member dues.

National associations of Greek organizations say their key role is to provide "ongoing education and advice" to their local chapters, which are "self-governing and independent student organizations." And they act quickly to enforce their policies, primarily by closing or suspending individual chapters, according to an email from representatives of the National Panhellenic Council and the North-American Interfraternity Conference.

"While each chapter is self-governing, it has been educated by its national organization and its local advisers on these topics and should understand its responsibilities, just as each individual member should understand what behavior is expected," the email says.

But the policies often work, first and foremost, to protect the national organizations legally, says Douglas E. Fierberg, a lawyer who has handled numerous high-profile lawsuits against Greek organizations for injuries and deaths related to hazing. In doing so, they leave individual members on the hook.

"What members don't know is that if individuals are found to have violated the risk-management policies, they will be excluded from insurance coverage," Mr. Fierberg says. Because of that, the national groups have little or no incentive to do a better job of monitoring members' behavior, he says.

What's more, the national Greek organizations also have not been responsive to concerns of campus leaders, says Kevin Kruger, executive director of Naspa — Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education.

"Many vice presidents of student affairs are frus-

"The greater control you set up for Greek life, the more liability you assume."

trated that they can't get a phone call back from the nationals," Mr. Kruger says. "That's a problem."

CAMPUS COP-OUT

Colleges, too, have often avoided the tough decisions to punish fraternities or sororities, often for financial reasons, say several higher-education experts.

One reason is that members of Greek organizations are often reliable donors to the institution.

"There's generally been a fear of responding in a strong way," says Gentry R. McCreary, associate dean of students and deputy Title IX coordinator at the University of West Florida. "If you're upsetting alumni, you're upsetting potential donors."

Another reason is that fraternity and sorority members maintain powerful positions in Congress and in statehouses across the country.

For example, the Fraternity and Sorority Political Action Committee represents Greek organizations on Capitol Hill and boasts contributions of more than \$2 million over the past decade to more than 100 Congressional candidates.

Its website features a quotation from Rep. Steny Hoyer, a Sigma Chi member and Maryland Democrat who is minority whip in the U.S. House of Representatives. Eight U.S. senators and more than two dozen U.S. representatives who were members of Greek organizations are expected to attend a dinner in Washington that the committee will host in late April.

But the challenges to overseeing Greek organizations on campuses are sometimes the result of policy decisions made by the colleges.

For example, a college may allow members of

Greek organizations to live on campus property — sometimes in houses owned by the chapter — with little or no supervision of the kind provided to students in traditional dormitories.

That arrangement can create both legal and practical hurdles to enforcing college rules, say Mr. Fierberg and others.

Because the houses are privately owned, campus police officers may be able to enter in only two situations: if they're invited in or in an emergency.

And even if residence-life staff members live in the houses, as is sometimes the case, colleges may not have or be willing to spend more money for adequate staff coverage, Mr. Koepsell says.

Mr. Schneider, the higher-education lawyer, says that the struggles to oversee Greek organizations are part of a bigger conversation about how much colleges should be responsible for students in general.

Since the 1960s, institutions have slowly given students more and more responsibility for their own actions, he says. Now the pendulum may be swinging the other way.

He warns in an article, however, that colleges should weigh the unintended consequences of greater regulation.

"Put simply, it is a mistake for institutions to simply assume that they are under a legal duty to corral rowdy fraternities," he wrote. "To the contrary, there may be instances that such a duty is created solely by efforts to rein these organizations in."

Mr. Koepsell says that kind of approach will not work in the long run: "You can do the arms-length thing and minimize your liability, but are you really? It's eventually going to blow back on the university."

Originally published on March 27, 2015

When Fraternities Go Underground, Problems Surface

By KATHERINE MANGAN

FIFTEEN YEARS AGO, Alpha Tau Omega's American University chapter had its charter yanked after a long string of hazing and alcohol violations. But instead of disbanding, the brothers of Epsilon Iota — the name given to the chapter — went underground. They continued recruiting and hazing new members and hosting raucous parties, but now with even less oversight than before.

In short, the fraternity went rogue. And like other offshoots that spring up after national organizations or colleges try to shut Greek groups down, Epsilon Iota became more reckless once it was freed from the rules that apply to others.

In 2014, some 70 pages of lurid emails and text messages surfaced in which people who were believed to be members bragged about abusing drugs and raping drunk women.

Students demanded that the university crack down. Until recently, the most it determined it

ministrators often struggle to contain groups that revive themselves after the hammer falls.

Some colleges have tried to ban participation in the groups, which include sororities, and the national organizations blame the breakaway chapters for sullying their reputations. Aside from issuing caution, everyone says their hands are tied.

Underground fraternities "are recruiting students and actively thumbing their noses at the universities," said Gentry R. McCreary, a consultant with the Ncherm Group, a firm that advises colleges on risk issues, including behaviors like hazing and problem drinking.

If these groups are hard to control at private universities like American, "they're impossible to regulate at public schools," said Mr. McCreary, who is a former director of Greek affairs at the University of Alabama at Tuscaloosa. "You can't restrict people from associating with anyone they want to associate with."

And for some students, there's a certain cachet to belonging to an underground frat.

"The way they see it, no one's checking IDs at the door and they have a lot more freedom," said Hank Nuwer, a professor of journalism at Franklin College and a national expert on hazing. "As a grandparent, they scare the heck out of me, but they aren't going to scare an undergraduate."

A few years ago, a fraternity humor website listed the pros and cons of "going rogue." Among the pros:

"Dry rush enforcement and hazing allegations and all that other garbage superiors hold over your heads like a guillotine would be a thing of the past."

WARNINGS AND MONITORING

Colleges face a huge range of challenges when trying to crack down on unauthorized groups, but that hasn't stopped them from trying.

Officials at the University of Pennsylvania announced in April that they would begin monitoring

could do was to warn students and their parents year after year to stay clear of Epsilon Iota.

The Washington, D.C., university isn't alone.

A national furor over sexual assaults, dangerous drinking, and hazing is putting pressure on colleges to shut down problematic chapters. But ad-

"If you don't recognize them any more, you're basically giving them carte blanche to do whatever they want."



GREG KAHN FOR THE CHRONICLE

For some students, there's a certain cachet to belonging to an unauthorized fraternity or sorority. They see the groups as providing freedom from university rules on drinking, hazing, and other behaviors.

behavior at unrecognized fraternities and sororities that operate off campus. Those groups, some of which formed after Greek chapters were kicked off campus, will have to adhere to the same hazing and alcohol standards as recognized Greek groups.

The notice went out after students protested a sexually suggestive party invitation that an unrecognized off-campus fraternity known as "Oz" sent to freshmen women. "We're looking for the fun ones," it read in part. "Tonight is your first showing. So please wear something tight."

Students at American were similarly outraged by an invitation this spring — this one sent by Epsilon Iota, the same chapter that was shut down years ago.

The dean of students' office sent out a note to "strongly discourage" people from attending that event, or any other sponsored by the fraternity. The student government followed up with a warning detailing the litany of abuses members had been accused of.

Epsilon Iota "is fundamentally at odds with our campus values and presents a danger to our community," the message from student government said.

The warning went out two weeks before Taylor Dumpson took over as American's first black student-body president — a milestone that prompted

someone to hang bananas with noose-like ropes on the campus. Some were marked with the letters of the historically black sorority, Alpha Kappa Alpha, that Ms. Dumpson belongs to.

Despite her own participation in Greek life, Ms. Dumpson draws a bright line between the official chapters and rogue groups like Epsilon Iota, which she considers more an "underground cult." By promoting a "rape culture," the group gives all of Greek life a bad name, she said.

Members of Epsilon Iota, contacted through the group's Facebook page, did not respond to requests for comment.

A university spokeswoman said American hasn't ignored the problem and that it "works actively to notify students of the fact that this group is not affiliated with AU and that students should not participate in any of their activities. This is done at orientations as well as through letters to parents and students."

Some worry, though, about the unintended consequences of alerting students to an event hosted by an unsupervised fraternity with a reputation for wild partying.

"Warning students about them can be counterproductive because you're shining a light on a group they might not have been aware of," Mr. McCreary said.

The university pointed out that it didn't provide any details about the party, including the location, but it did warn students that members of the group had been accused of sexual assault during previous parties.

The dean's letter also said the event was being monitored by campus and local police officers and that anyone violating the university's student-conduct code could face sanctions.

And last month, it took its harshest action yet, issuing interim suspensions to 18 suspected members of Epsilon Iota for alleged violations of the student-conduct code, including "perpetuating an underground group" that violates university policies.

Steps like those should be enough to dissuade students, but another effective strategy, according to Mr. McCreary, is getting sororities to agree not to participate in social events with rogue fraternities.

POLICIES TOWARD ROGUE CHAPTERS

But sororities, too, have struggled to deal with unrecognized offshoots that rise from the ashes of closed chapters.

One unrecognized sorority at Pennsylvania State University, known as Trilogy, uses that lack of oversight to its advantage in recruiting pledges, according to a piece in *The Daily Beast*.

Trilogy emerged as an independent student group after the national board of Delta Delta Delta closed the Penn State chapter in 2009 over hazing and other violations.

A campus spokeswoman said its sole function, as one of more than 1,000 student groups, is to raise money for a charity dance marathon. But like any other group, she said, its members are free to socialize at fraternity parties. Trilogy members were reportedly partying at the Beta Theta Pi fraternity house where a pledge, Timothy Piazza, suffered fatal injuries after consuming a massive amount of alcohol and falling down stairs in February.

Since it's not an official sorority, Trilogy wouldn't be bound by the strict limits Penn State's president, Eric J. Barron, imposed on the Greek system after Mr. Piazza's death. He permanently shut down the campus chapter of Beta Theta Pi and imposed strict limits on the rest of the Greek system.

But university officials said individual members of Trilogy could be punished if they were found to have violated university rules.

Other colleges have taken a tougher approach.

Lafayette College banned participation in unrecognized chapters in 2013, after the alcohol-related death of a freshman who had reportedly attended recruiting events at underground fraternities.

In 2014, Amherst College's Board of Trustees extended the college's ban on fraternities and sororities

to include underground groups both on and off campus, as well as "fraternity-like" and "sorority-like" organizations. Students found to be participating in such groups could be suspended or expelled.

The board explained in a statement that the underground groups had a big impact on campus social life, but because they weren't recognized, the college wasn't able to enforce behavior rules. Still, "the appearance of college responsibility cannot be avoided, both because the membership of underground fraternities consists of Amherst students and because the college has acquiesced in the fraternities' existence," the board said.

A college spokeswoman said no one has been disciplined for fraternity activity since the policy was enacted.

Lehigh University, which doesn't ban participation outright, posts a list of Greek groups that have been banned for violations and alerts students and their parents about the dangers of participating in underground groups.

Lehigh also contacted the national organizations of two fraternities that are operating off campus; one severed its ties with the campus chapter and the other didn't.

'NOTHING WE CAN DO ABOUT IT'

If colleges profess a degree of helplessness to deal with unauthorized fraternities, so do the national chapters of the groups that have kicked them out.

Wynn Smiley, chief executive of Alpha Tau Omega, whose closed chapter at American University spawned Epsilon Iota, said members are "livid" about how the rogue group has sullied the fraternity's reputation.

"There's absolutely nothing we can do about it," because the national group severed ties with the chapter back in 2001, he said.

In 2014, the national chapter of Kappa Sigma released a statement following the alcohol-related death of a freshman who was pledging its chapter at West Virginia University. The national group said it was saddened by the death, but that there was little it could do because it had already yanked the chapter's charter due to previous, unrelated violations.

For universities, the question of whether to shut down a problematic chapter or simply monitor it more closely is more complicated than it seems.

"If you don't recognize them any more, you're basically giving them carte blanche to do whatever they want," said Mr. McCreary. "And that can create more problems than it solves."

Update: In August 2017, American University said it had expelled 18 students and disciplined one more for their involvement in Epsilon Iota.

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TRINITY COLLEGE

Trinity College, in Connecticut, decreed in 2012 that its fraternities and sororities should achieve gender parity by 2016. So far, not much has changed.

What Happened After One College Tried to Make Greek Life Go Coed

By SARAH BROWN

NEARLY three years ago, Trinity College did some soul-searching about Greek life on the campus after a spike in drug and alcohol problems and a drop down the national rankings.

The small liberal-arts college in Connecticut announced a major change as part of a plan to improve campus social life: Its seven single-gender fraternities and sororities would have to be-

come coeducational. By the fall of 2016 the groups would need to have virtually equal shares of male and female members.

One year shy of that deadline, however, not a single student has crossed the gender divide in those seven organizations.

The idea of coed Greek life had precedent at Trinity: The college's trustees actually approved a similar plan 23 years ago. It fizzled because there

were no mechanisms in place to enforce it. When the college revived the idea, a panel initially recommended setting target quotas for fraternities and sororities to ensure compliance.

The target for this coming fall had called for 30 percent of fraternity members to be female students, and vice versa for sororities. The final benchmark would have required 45 percent minority-gender membership by the fall of 2016. But those quotas have disappeared.

What happened?

Kathy Andrews, a spokeswoman for Trinity, wrote in an email to *The Chronicle* that the college's goal "continues to be that these efforts will result in quantifiable progress, in terms of gender equity, among Trinity's selective social organizations." Within fraternities and sororities, she said, it's still expected that "the number of male and female members will be reasonably close to equal" by the fall of next year.

Greek leaders have made an effort to achieve gender parity, said Alexander I. Loy, a 2015 Trinity graduate and former president of the college's Kappa Sigma chapter. But in his conversations with Trinity students, he said, "I didn't come across a single female that wanted to be a member of a fraternity on campus or a guy that wanted to be a member of a sorority."

With public scrutiny on fraternities continuing to build, a number of colleges are considering plans to shake up their Greek systems. Making Greek life coed is one strategy that, in theory, would force fraternities to clean up their acts but also keep their houses on campus, satisfying students as well as alumni and other potential donors who might be angered by a move to ax the Greeks.

Elsewhere in Connecticut, Wesleyan University followed in Trinity's footsteps last fall, announcing a coed mandate for its residential fraternities. One Wesleyan chapter is fighting the university in court over the plan.

Trinity's experience, however, may be a lesson for other colleges, said Gentry R. McCreary, chief executive and a managing partner at Dyad Strategies, a higher-education risk-management firm. Colleges that are grappling with Greek life need to "stop looking for easy fixes and magic bullets," Mr. McCreary said. "They don't exist."

A NEW SOCIAL CODE

In 2011, James F. Jones Jr., Trinity's president at the time, described one of his wishes for the college's future in a white paper that was prepared at the request of the faculty.

"If only I had Harry Potter's wand, I would wave it over Vernon Street and change all the fraternities and sororities into theme houses," which students could join based on "merit and individual value" versus appearance and economic privilege,

he wrote.

In response, the college's Board of Trustees assigned a committee made up of students, faculty, staff, and alumni to write a new social code and recommend reforms of Greek life.

Many of the committee's proposed changes have become reality. In the fall of 2014, male and female students interested in joining Greek life had to attend recruitment events at every fraternity and sorority.

"It wasn't as awkward as I expected," said Mr. Loy of women participating in fraternity rush. At the same time, he said, "we knew they wouldn't be there unless they had to be."

He likened the atmosphere to "an eighth-grade dance."

Last spring fraternities and sororities had to keep recruitment events open to men and women, though interested students were no longer required to visit every house.

Ms. Andrews said all fraternity and sorority chapters had also met higher academic standards for the past year — students need a 3.0 grade-point average in their previous semester to rush an organization, and chapters need an average 3.0 GPA among members — and pledging had been eliminated.

The committee's initial recommendations said that Greek chapters failing to meet the annual benchmarks toward gender parity would face a warning and, potentially, a ban as a Trinity organization.

But Jane H. Nadel-Klein, an anthropology professor at the college who was a member of a committee charged with carrying out the changes, said the quotas had not been included in the final version of the policy. And despite the lack of opposite-gender members in seven of Trinity's Greek organizations, no fraternity or sorority chapter had been penalized.

"Now we seem to be in a kind of limbo where I would say we've basically made no progress," said Ms. Nadel-Klein, who personally supported abolishing the Greek system.

William Morrow, president of the college's Inter-Greek Council, asserted that the plan lacked genuine input from students. Mr. Jones held forums during the 2012-13 academic year at which students could ask questions about the policy. But Mr. Morrow said many students — including non-Greeks — did not support it, and he didn't feel that students' concerns had been given any weight.

Though Mr. Jones had spurred the college's actions to change Greek life, he did not remain at Trinity to carry out the coed mandate. He stepped down in 2014, a year earlier than he'd planned. He then became interim president of Sweet Briar College and supported a plan to shut down the institution, but after Sweet Briar alumnae won an appeal to keep the college open, Mr. Jones resigned.

Trinity College leaders said at the time of the announcement of Mr. Jones's departure from the Connecticut institution that the move was unrelated to the opposition to the Greek-life mandate. *The Chronicle* could not reach him for comment.

UNCERTAIN PROGRESS

Former and current Greek leaders say they're not sure what the future will hold for their organizations at Trinity.

The college has tried to measure progress on the coed mandate. Mr. Loy was part of a committee that examined each Greek chapter's annual report on working toward gender parity and other standards.

He said the committee had measured how well fraternities had reached out to women and whether fraternities had offered women bids, among other criteria. But he said the committee's work on the coed policy had seemed to hit a dead end because "there just wasn't a whole lot we could measure."

In a November 2014 letter to the campus, Trinity's current president, Joanne Berger-Sweeney, praised "substantial progress" in Greek life and said the college was "continuing to consider options for improved gender parity." Ms. Berger-Sweeney was not made available for an interview this week.

Mr. Morrow said he was confident that Ms. Berger-Sweeney would involve Greek-organization leaders as well as faculty members and other students in future discussions of coed Greek life.

Gregory B. Smith, a political-science professor who opposes the policy, thinks Trinity's administration might be "treading water" on the coed mandate and "hoping it will go away." But Ms. Nadel-Klein said many faculty members, including

herself, hope that's not the case.

"The idea of Greek life embodies a fundamentally antidemocratic and gender-biased system," she said.

Still, as Trinity, Wesleyan, and other colleges move forward with various changes in Greek life, Mr. McCreary said administrators should keep in mind that a college's culture can't be transformed by targeting one aspect of campus life.

The coed idea "will not have the impact" that colleges are looking for, he said, "and it might have a lot of unintended consequences," such as declines in alumni giving.

Another potential drawback is that national fraternity and sorority organizations require chapters to be same-sex. If Trinity's Kappa Kappa Gamma sorority chapter accepted men, for instance, the National Panhellenic Conference would revoke the group's affiliation. Operating without national oversight, Mr. McCreary said, would make the college's chapters "a huge risk-management liability."

In 2012, Mr. Smith wrote a letter to the committee devising Greek-life reforms; he argued for an expansion of the Greek system to 24 chapters, with 12 fraternities and 12 sororities. More options, he said at the time, would establish a better balance for women in Trinity's Greek system, which has only two sororities.

He said his idea had a lot of support among students. The committee wrote in response that the plan would be too costly.

But Joshua Frank, a senior and former president of Trinity's student government, said he believes the college's current administration has recognized the flaws of the coed policy.

To improve Trinity's social climate, he said, "we've got to focus on broader college issues" like socioeconomic diversity, "not just 20 percent of the campus."

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A Filmmaker Sheds Light on a ‘Nuanced System of Hazing’

By NELL GLUCKMAN

HAZING on university campuses has re-emerged in the national spotlight since Timothy Piazza, a 19-year-old Pennsylvania State University student, died as a result of injuries suffered in an initiation ceremony of the Beta Theta Pi fraternity in February. Eighteen fraternity members were criminally charged, and the university announced steps to toughen its oversight of Greek life.

But hazing exists beyond fraternity-pledging rituals. In a documentary film planned for release next year, the filmmaker Byron Hurt will take a critical look at the role hazing plays in many types of groups, including in the military, the medical profession, and at universities.

Mr. Hurt was inspired to make the film after learning about two young African-American men who died on college campuses. Their stories felt personal for Mr. Hurt, who had been hazed and participated in hazing rituals as a member of Omega Psi Phi fraternity at Northeastern University. He hopes the film will be used by educators and activists to help end violent and abusive rituals.

Mr. Hurt's other films include *Soul Food Junkies* and *Hip-Hop: Beyond Beats and Rhymes*. He has received funding from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation and the Independent Television Service, as well as other sources, for *Hazing*.

Q. Can you first tell me about your film?

A. *Hazing* is a documentary that will take a broad look at the culture of hazing in America. I am looking at some of the traditional spaces where people know hazing exists, like fraternities, sororities, and sports teams. I'm also taking a look at performance organizations like marching bands, clubs, as well as areas that people would never even consider, like the medical field. In nursing, for exam-

ple, there's a culture of hazing that people know very little about.

I was inspired to make this film after reading about the death of George Desdunes, a member of Sigma Alpha Epsilon. He tragically died from alcohol overintoxication at Cornell University. His body was left in the library of the fraternity house and was discovered by the person who cleans the house.

I really connected with the story because I'm in a fraternity, I pledged a fraternity, and I participated in hazing rituals. Something like this could have happened to me, and I could have perpetuated something like this, leading to serious injury or death. I thought I was the right person to explore this culture.

There's also a real high level of toxic masculinity within hazing culture that I feel really equipped to examine as a filmmaker.

Q. I read that you had been inspired by Robert Champion, a member of a marching band who died in a hazing ritual at Florida A&M University.

A. Robert Champion's story was the story that broke the camel's back. I heard about it. I watched it on the news. I said, Byron you have to do this. This is your film to make.

Q. Tell me more about your experience in a fraternity? Are you going to address it in the film?

A. I'm a proud member of Omega Psi Phi Inc., and I'm still active on the graduate level. Pledging in my fraternity was a really rigorous process. I don't want to go into it at this time, because it is a secret-society organization and some of that will be revealed in the film.

I didn't really have the courage to confront hazing when I was pledging. There's a reason. Hazing is a system of humiliation, degradation, in many cases violence, emotional abuse. And it's normalized, especially among young people. Some people really believe the process is necessary in order to create members in good standing who are respected and have credibility within the group. It's that



COURTESY OF BYRON HURT

culture of hazing that I really want to challenge. I want to sensitize people to the fact that hazing, in many cases, is really assault and is really abusive.

Q. I've read in other interviews that you're expecting some backlash. What do you think that backlash is going to be?

A. I think people are going to feel really defensive, particularly members of black Greek-letter organizations.

There is a lot at stake. There are organizations that risk being sued or losing their insurance or just receiving negative publicity. And there are, rightly, a lot of people in those organizations who believe their organizations do more good than bad. They feel the organizations are being painted with a broad brush.

I expect there to be people who feel like I am sharing information that is supposed to be secret and should be an in-house conversation. But in-house conversations have not ended hazing. In-house conversations have not reformed the culture, and young people are still dying today.

I would hate to send my daughter off to college for her to pledge an organization, to join a team, even, and become severely injured or possibly die because she decided to join an organization for all the right reasons. But the culture of hazing doesn't discriminate. I don't believe that those young men at Penn State intended to kill someone. I don't think someone intended to kill Robert Champion or George Desdunes or Daniel Chen. or Michael Deng I don't believe people said, We want to drive them to the point where they commit suicide. They don't think that they're going to get caught or be complicit in a death.

Q. Have you found in your investigation of hazing that certain themes persist?

A. There is a common universal theme, which is: I went through this process in order to get entry into this organization, team, or field, and so therefore you have to go through this process. Otherwise you're not worthy; you're not as valuable as the people who came before you.

And so there is this expectation that if you are going to receive credibility as a member of that group, then you must submit yourself to that hazing process. That, I think, is universal.

There are distinctions. In black fraternities and sororities, there is an emphasis on physical hazing, which could include violence. In white fraternities, based on my research and interviews, there's a greater emphasis on binge drinking, providing prescription drugs or illegal drugs, providing money to "big brothers," and also participating in sexual acts that degrade women. In white sororities there's a lot of sexual humiliation, where girls are told to perform sexual acts that would embarrass

or shame them. There's a lot of emotional abuse with girls in general: You're not pretty enough; you're not worthy enough; you're not good enough to be a part of this organization; you're fat. Really, really personal emotional abuse and a lot of guilt-ing and shaming.

It's very layered. I don't think people realize how nuanced the system of hazing is.

Q. A lot of our readers are faculty and administrators at universities. What can you say to help them understand hazing better?

A. When a young person is going through a pledge process, they are forced to do things that they don't normally do. Sleep deprivation is a huge issue, so they may be falling asleep in class. They may be missing class. Their grades may fall dramatically.

I interviewed a young man whose professor noticed many of these things. Because the student was involved a big public case that received a lot of media attention, the professor was aware that his student had gone through an incredible amount of trauma. Rather than failing him or thinking that he was blowing off the work, he helped the student get through his coursework successfully and was understanding about the trauma that he had experienced. There are students suffering from PTSD-like symptoms after the pledge process.

Q. As a filmmaker and a member of a fraternity, you have two allegiances, to your viewers and to your fraternity brothers. How do you decide what to share about your experience?

A. It's very complicated, and I am still wading through how much I will reveal and how much will remain secret. There are certain rituals and things that are sacred that I don't want to discuss publicly. But I do draw the line when it comes to hazing.

I would make different choices today regarding pledging and going through what I went through, because I value myself more. I have a much greater appreciation about violence, particularly male violence and a culture of masculinity that is often violent. That's what I'm hoping to address in the film.

There will be a level of personal disclosure that will provide a positive example of someone who experienced the culture of hazing and who now challenges it through a critical lens.

I still have relationships with the people in my fraternity, and I respect many of them. I consider many of them to be my friends, and they are my lifelong brothers.

But I do feel we need to challenge our attitudes and behaviors. I think we have to be leaders. I consider this film an act of leadership.

This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

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