

Hazing Case Study Scenario #1

Large Public University – Traditional College Town

The Context:

Plainview State University (PSU) is a large public flagship institution with approximately 35,000 undergraduate students located in a traditional college town of 60,000 residents. The university's fraternity and sorority life (FSL) community is a prominent feature of campus culture, with approximately 25% of undergraduates affiliated across 45 chapters representing the Interfraternity Council (IFC | 18 chapters), Panhellenic Council (PHC | 15 chapters), National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC | 8 chapters), and Multicultural Greek Council (MGC | 4 chapters). Most IFC and PHC chapters are housed in facilities along Greek Row near campus, while NPHC and MGC chapters operate without dedicated housing. The FSL community is deeply embedded in university traditions, homecoming activities, and philanthropic efforts that generate significant funds for local and national causes.

PSU operates under a deferred recruitment model for IFC and PHC organizations, with formal recruitment occurring in the spring semester. The Office of Fraternity and Sorority Life includes a director, two assistant directors, and one graduate assistant who advise councils and provide chapter support. The university has a comprehensive hazing policy that prohibits any activity that causes physical, mental, or emotional harm, and requires all new members to complete online hazing prevention training. Despite these policies, hazing remains a persistent concern, particularly during new member education periods.

The Situation:

During the fall semester, the Alpha Beta (AB) fraternity initiated a new member class of 32 men. As part of their new member education program, the chapter instituted a practice called "pledge duties" where new members were required to complete various tasks for active members. Initially, these tasks appeared benign, like cleaning the chapter house common areas, setting up for chapter meetings, and helping with philanthropy events. However, as the semester progressed, these duties escalated in both frequency and intensity.

By mid-October, new members were being expected to arrive at the chapter house by 6:00 AM on weekdays to prepare breakfast for active members, followed by mandatory "study hours" in the chapter house basement from 10:00 PM to 2:00 AM, during which new members were often interrupted and not permitted to actually study for their classes, but instead had to memorize chapter history, the Greek alphabet, and active member names and biographical information. New members were also required to attend all home football games and remain standing in the student section for the entire game, regardless of weather conditions. These expectations were causing new members to become sleep-deprived, miss their own classes, academic commitments, and experience significant stress.

The situation came to the attention of university officials when a first-year new member, Marcus, fell asleep during his chemistry lecture for the third time in two weeks. His professor, concerned about the sudden change in Marcus's academic performance, reached out to him after class. Marcus initially hesitated but eventually disclosed that he was averaging four hours of sleep per night due to his fraternity's new member requirements. He explained that he was afraid to speak up because he didn't want to lose his place in the organization and feared social retaliation from both new members and active members. Marcus also mentioned that several other new members had expressed similar concerns privately but felt pressured to "push through" the process because it was "tradition" and "what everyone before them had done."

The professor reported the concerns to the Dean of Students Office, which launched an investigation. When interviewed, several other Δ KE new members confirmed Marcus's account and provided additional details about requirements to memorize extensive information under threat of verbal reprimand, perform physical exercises as "consequences" for mistakes during chapter education

sessions, and maintain a strict hierarchy where new members could not make eye contact with or speak to active members unless explicitly addressed. The chapter's president and new member educator expressed genuine surprise that these activities were problematic, stating they were "building brotherhood" and "no different from what we went through."

Your Role:

You are a student member of the Interfraternity Council Executive Board and also serve on the university's Student Conduct Board. The Dean of Students has convened an emergency meeting with IFC leadership and FSL professional staff to address this situation. As a student leader in the community, you are asked to develop a recommendation for a comprehensive response plan that addresses immediate safety concerns for current ΔKE new members, determines appropriate accountability measures for the chapter and individual members involved, implements educational interventions to prevent similar situations across all IFC chapters, and creates mechanisms for new members across all organizations to safely report concerns without fear of retaliation. Consider how you will balance accountability with education, address the "tradition" justification for hazing, and ensure meaningful culture change beyond just this one chapter.

Keywords: large public university, flagship institution, traditional college town, residential campus, high Greek affiliation, IFC fraternity, sleep deprivation, academic impact, mental hazing, tradition, new member education, peer pressure, reporting barriers