

Hazing Case Study Scenario #2

Small Private University – Significant FSL Presence

The Context:

Heritage University (HU) is a private institution with approximately 15,000 undergraduate students located in a major metropolitan area. Despite being in a large city, the campus maintains a close-knit residential community atmosphere, with over 60% of students living on campus. The fraternity and sorority life community is highly visible and influential, with approximately 40% of students affiliated across 28 chapters representing the Interfraternity Council (IFC | 10 chapters), Panhellenic Council (PHC | 12 chapters), National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC | 4 chapters), and United Greek Council (UGC | 2 chapters). The strong FSL presence means that Greek affiliation often plays a significant role in students' social experiences, leadership opportunities, and campus involvement.

Heritage University has a robust FSL office with a Director of Fraternity and Sorority Life, two Assistant Directors, and dedicated support staff. The university requires values-based recruitment training, new member education programs to be registered and approved, and all chapters to adopt individualized anti-hazing policies. HU conducts fall and spring formal recruitment for IFC and PHC organizations. The university has positioned itself as a leader in values-based fraternity and sorority life, and administrative leadership has publicly committed to maintaining high standards for Greek organizations while acknowledging the positive contributions these communities make to student development and campus culture.

The Situation:

Alpha Beta Gamma (ABG) sorority recently completed fall formal recruitment and welcomed a new member class of 45 women. The chapter has a strong reputation for academic excellence and campus involvement, with members serving in numerous student government and campus organization leadership roles. However, concerns emerged three weeks into the new member period when several new members confided in their Resident Assistants about troubling aspects of their new member experience.

According to these reports, new members were being subjected to a practice called "standards sessions" where they were required to meet in small groups with active members who would critique their appearance, weight, clothing choices, social media presence, and behavior at campus events. During these sessions, new members were told to stand while active members remained seated, were not permitted to defend themselves or respond to criticism, and were sometimes brought to tears by harsh comments about their bodies or personal choices. New members reported being told they needed to "represent the chapter well" and that these sessions were "for their own good" to help them "become the best versions of themselves."

Additionally, new members described a points system where they were required to earn a minimum number of points each week by attending chapter events, social functions, and study hours. Failure to meet point requirements resulted in "consequences" including writing apology letters to active members, performing cleaning duties at the sorority house, or being excluded from social events. The system created an environment where new members felt constant pressure to prioritize sorority obligations over academic work, other campus involvements, and personal well-being. Several new members mentioned they had stopped attending club meetings and reduced their course loads because they couldn't balance everything.

The situation reached a critical point when Sarah, a first-year new member, experienced a panic attack during a standards session after being told she needed to "watch what she was doing" and "spend more time at the gym." Sarah's roommate, who was not affiliated with Greek life, found her crying in their residence hall room and convinced her to speak with the hall director. An investigation revealed that the chapter's new member education program had never been formally submitted for approval as required by university policy, and the standards sessions and point system were not included in any official chapter documentation. When confronted, chapter leadership indicated these

practices had been part of their new member process "for years" and were intended to "build strong, confident women" and "maintain chapter standards."

Your Role:

You are the Panhellenic Council President and have been meeting with the Vice President for Student Life and the Director of Fraternity and Sorority Life regularly prior to this incident. You are not meeting about this incident and are being asked to address this situation. You are asked to develop a response plan that ensures the immediate well-being and support of affected new members, determines appropriate accountability for ABG chapter leadership and members who facilitated these practices, addresses the underlying issues of body image pressures and mental health impacts within sorority culture, implements preventive measures across all PHC chapters to ensure new member education programs are transparent and values-based, and creates a process for ongoing monitoring and support. Consider how Greek culture at your institution may inadvertently perpetuate harmful standards and how to shift toward truly values-based practices that are already a priority in the campus culture.

Keywords: small private university, urban campus, residential campus, high Greek affiliation, PHC sorority, emotional hazing, body image, mental health, standards, sorority culture, values-based practices, accountability

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