

ST Hazing Awareness and Prevention for Students

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Introduction

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Course Overview

The content in this course was designed with care and sensitivity; however, some may find certain topics personally upsetting [especially for survivors of sexual abuse or assault]. If you feel the need to talk with someone, please contact your institution's counseling and health services department or a related resource in your community.

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Course Overview con't

As a student on a college campus, chances are you've heard a lot about hazing. You might have some preconceived notions about what it looks like and where it happens, and often those ideas are shaped by the way the media portrays it in popular movies and television shows.

Unfortunately, not everything we learn on TV is correct. Hazing is far more common than you might believe, and it doesn't just happen in fraternities and sororities. Some of the people who experience hazing think they're having fun, and many times the rituals are considered normal parts of belonging to a community. However, hazing isn't a benign part of belonging. It can have devastating, even deadly, consequences.

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Goals

This course will give you a better understanding about hazing so that you can identify **when** it's happening and possibly prevent disastrous incidents from occurring in the future.

By the end of this course, you will be able to:

- Identify the key components in the definition of hazing
- Recognize who is involved in hazing and why they exhibit certain behaviors
- Recognize signs and examples of hazing
- Identify the risks associated with hazing (and)
- Identify what you can and should do to protect yourselves and your peers from dangerous hazing behaviors

Later, you'll be able to test your learning with a short quiz. So, if you're ready, let's begin.



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Understanding Hazing

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Definition of Hazing

So, what *is* hazing? Currently there is no standard definition for hazing. When there is no one single definition, and the state laws and school Codes of Conduct vary considerably, it can be confusing. To make it even more confusing, many associations have a completely different definition of what they consider hazing. For example, the NCAA may define hazing differently than your fraternity, sorority, band or club. To make it even more complicated, those who have conducted research may have had a completely different definition of hazing. Today, we'll breakdown a definition provided by the Alfred University's national survey on hazing that you can use and understand.

The following definition is probably the best and easiest to interpret, "hazing is any activity expected of someone joining or participating in a group that humiliates, degrades, abuses or endangers them regardless of the person's willingness to participate."

There are three parts to that definition.

Definition of Hazing con't

The first part is “any activity expected of someone joining or participating in a group.” When researchers first began studying hazing, they assumed that it was solely those who are **joining** a group, team or club organization – essentially a “newbie,” pledge or a rookie. However, there are more and more incidents of hazing happening to **active, participating** members within a group whose status or role has changed. For example, maybe they've been promoted to a captain, president, or band leader.

The second part defines the purpose of hazing activities, which are intended to be “humiliating, degrading, abusive, or [one that] endangers” the participants.

Last, but not least, is the third part, “regardless of the person's willingness to participate.” Researchers found there were many students who were knowingly hazed - who wanted to be hazed - and who felt like they volunteered to be hazed.

Definition of Hazing con't

Madison: This “compliance” makes prevention challenging. An example of this is when students under the age of 21 say they willingly consumed alcohol or drugs, say they enjoyed it, say they felt like it was beneficial to “bond” with their friends, and felt they fully consented to getting drunk or high. Even so, **the behavior** is still a violation of an institution's code of conduct, as well as state law. So, their willingness to participate **does not** excuse the behavior. As said earlier, state laws differ greatly, and most states currently have an anti-hazing criminal or educational law on the books.

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Examples of Hazing

There are a wide range of activities that can be considered hazing, such as:

- sleep-deprivation
- substance abuse
- sexual assault and simulations
- socially isolating new members
- water intoxication
- abduction and kidnapping
- “lock-ups” and confinement
- physical exercises
- demeaning skits with degrading or humiliating acts
- “swirlies”
- non-sanctioned scavenger hunts
- ingestion of vile substances
- “drop-offs”
- personal servitude
- “line-ups”
- rookie duties
- defacement of property
- stealing and other illegal activities
- threats or implied threats
- drinking games
- assigning demerits
- silence periods with implied threats for violation
- demeaning names
- expecting certain items to always be in one’s possession
- verbal abuse
- asking new members to wear embarrassing attire
- forced consumption of alcohol or drugs
- beating, paddling, whipping, branding or other forms of assault

Examples of Hazing con't

There can be subtle types of verbal and psychological hazing that when viewed by an outsider, may not seem that big of a deal. Subtle hazing can be in the form of demeaning names or being required to always carry certain items on their person. You may wonder why members of this group are required to carry around a teddy bear, or why they're all dressed alike. Why can't they associate with other students or why are the rookies having to clean up after the football team gets done with practice? It may come to your attention, but because it's so subtle, you may wonder if it's actually considered hazing.

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Effects of Hazing

Well, it is. Seemingly innocent “rituals” like ostracizing students, requiring the performance of undesirable duties, or deprivation of privileges are acts of harassing and humiliating behavior. This may be requiring rookies to stand on the cafeteria tables and sing the national anthem or having to wear embarrassing attire. Bystanders look at this and may laugh, they may cringe, but will do little to stop it. These actions have nothing to do with the player’s ability to perform on the field, right? Sadly, it’s embarrassing, and the resulting shame can have lasting effects on certain individuals.

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Effects of Hazing con't

If you see this type of behavior in public, it's likely they're doing the dangerous hazing behavior in private. The same can be said about skit nights, sexual simulations, verbal abuse, threats and sleep deprivation.

There was a news report of a high school girls' gymnastic team where the first-year female rookies had to dress up as infants. They had to wear a bonnet, had to have a pacifier or baby bottle, and wear a diaper. They then had to parade into the local supermarket, stop, and sing "I'm a little teapot." Spectators laughed as the girls were marched out the back door of the grocery store. What people didn't see, as the team of freshman girls were guided to the back parking lot, was a circle of cars, all illuminating the middle of the circle, as each of the girls had to go out separately, get on their knees and eat a banana that was protruding from the pants of a football player. Obviously, very degrading and humiliating, whereas the individuals that saw the behavior inside the grocery store thought it was funny, silly or nonsensical.

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The Dangers of Hazing

Hazing can easily escalate to violent behavior, especially if new members are coerced or forced to consume alcohol or drugs. Often, these individuals feel that if they want to continue their membership and join the team, club or organization, it's expected that they have to drink copious amounts of alcohol. In some groups they may be told it's considered the "family drink" and it's part of the tradition of their initiation. As chronicled too often in the news, the amount of alcohol consumed can have deadly consequences.

Other violent behaviors might include being beaten or paddled. Sadly, it might also include having to endure a deadly gauntlet as was part of the tradition of the FAM-U (fam-yoo) marching band. Other victims reported the ingestion of very vile substances that might be rancid, or mixtures of different spoiled foods that are intended to get the individual sick. Some have reported water intoxication, where the new members were expected to consume so much water that their electrolytes were significantly out of balance and put their life in peril; and we've even had deaths occur because of this type of hazing behavior. There have been other reported incidents of abductions, kidnappings and sexual assaults as part of the initiation process.

The Dangers of Hazing

This has only been a partial list of different activities that have been defined as hazing either in a criminal case, civil suit or a campus policy violation. College students were held accountable for engaging in these types of activities toward new members that were joining or current members changing status within the group. As you can see, they vary greatly - some behaviors are obviously silly, nonsensical, or even stupid - but many are very concerning, dangerous and very alarming if they occur within your group, team, or club.

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Why Groups Haze

What purpose does it serve to abuse the very members you want to be part of your group, club or team?

Often in our culture, the idea of going through an initiation – even if it includes hazing - fulfills a basic need, and individuals seeking inclusivity are sometimes willing to do it regardless of the consequences. Some view hazing as being “no big deal,” that it’s just pranks or it’s just good-natured fun.

Since hazing can start as early as middle or high school and continue through college, the idea can feel “normal” – like “a tradition” – and can seem to provide value to a student’s experience. Interestingly, when they talk about the hazing activities – especially the dangerous behaviors – as a “tradition,” researchers have asked former members and alumni of the group, team or club if they experienced the same hazing, they would say “No, we never did anything like that - we may have done some other stuff, but we didn’t do anything nearly to that extent.”

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Why Groups Haze can't

Some may see hazing behavior necessary to bond, or for group cohesion. In reality though, those who are going through the hazing experience may feel the group cohesion, but they won't necessarily feel the bond with the entire group, especially to those that hazed them.

In research conducted by Alfred University, a significant percentage of those hazed wanted revenge as a result of what they endured. The individual who was hazed the previous year may have an opportunity to become the hazer. Frequently, the hazer will say, "this is what I went through the year before, so you have to do it too." Unfortunately, they may ratchet the hazing up a notch, or they may have changed it a bit, making it more humiliating, degrading, abusive or violent. As a result, incrementally, the hazing could escalate from being silly and nonsensical to dangerous or deadly over a few short years.

Not all hazing results in death, but what is common is that typically there is a power imbalance between those who want to join versus those who are part of the group.

Who is at Risk of Being Hazed

In understanding the scope of the problem, it's important to discern through the research that it's not just a "Greek thing." Most articles that you may have read online or seen on TV cover hazing incidents that have occurred in fraternities or sororities. Because their hazing initiations have involved alcohol, the overwhelming number of hazing deaths have occurred in Greek Letter Organizations. But no organization is immune.

A national study, done by Doctors Allen and Madden at the University of Maine, found hazing prevalent in any group, team or club college students join. Fifty-five percent of students reported being hazed. Whether it be an honor group, choir, band, religious-affiliated group, team, or a fraternity or sorority - all students who join groups are at risk of being hazed.

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Who is at Risk of Being Hazed con't

Additionally, hazing is not just a guy thing. Men, women and non-binary students engage in hazing behaviors. Young men tend to engage in risky behaviors which then can lead to dangerous outcomes, whereas women tend to use alcohol and humiliation when they haze. These are generalities and not entirely exclusive, but what is consistently true is that all genders participate in hazing.

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Why Some Individuals Agree to be Hazed

You may be wondering why some students submit to hazing. “Why are some willing to accept a group's authority by obediently engaging in acts that they normally would not perform?”

For some, they know there will be some hazing and they are willing to go along with it in order to be part of the group. But because the initiation is secret, new members don't know when the hazing will end, they don't know all the different hazing activities that will be expected of them, and they don't know the potential dangers of the hazing. They can not truly give informed consent. By going along with being hazed, they show their willingness to accept the group's authority.

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The Anatomy of a Hazing Incident

Another reason is the symbolic separation from their old lives. Some experience the initiation as a rite of passage. They are moving into different relationships, they're in college, they've grown up and out of their high school identity, and it gives meaning to obtain membership in the new group. They may view themselves now as an adult and may view it as proof that they are worthy of belonging to this group. It may feel transformational and they're wanting to experience the idea of "this is who I am now and I'm different than who I was before joining this group, team, or club."

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The Anatomy of a Hazing Incident cont.

Pledging a fraternity or sorority. Some say it's a rite of passage for many college students. Many see it as a ticket into a guaranteed social life. And they'll do anything just to get in. That may include dangerous activities that could put a college student's life in danger. Wyatt Baxter participated in his fraternity's Hell Week. He was kidnapped, taken to a bar, and forced to drink copious amounts of liquor. When he told his fraternity brothers he wanted to leave, they encouraged him to continue. Eventually, Wyatt was found unconscious in the street and taken to the emergency room by a local bystander.

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The Anatomy of a Hazing Incident con't

I originally went into this thinking that my purpose for pledging was to create a bond and become part of something that's greater than yourself. I wanted to become part of a brotherhood.

When you start pledging, there's an understanding that these people are going to be there for you. And that you're going to put your trust into their hands. But when you experience what I have, it shatters your trust.

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The Anatomy of a Hazing Incident can't

For weeks you're told that you can trust them. And as the pledging goes on, the pranks and activities start off pretty harmless. Maybe you have to clean some floors with a toothbrush, or drink hot sauce. They slowly gain your trust by being there for you.

But in the end, when I really needed them, they weren't there for me.

When I was in the hospital, only one of my "brothers" came to see me. One. And he came to ask me if my parents were going to press charges.

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Identifying and Reporting Hazing

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Initiations That Involve Alcohol

If alcohol is part of the initiation or tradition of your new team, group or club, this is a “red flag.” The greatest risk are those hazing initiations that involve alcohol. When we hear the news reports about hazing deaths, according to consultant Dave Westol, it will typically take place on one of three nights within Greek culture:

- Bid Night
- Big Brother or Sister Night, (or)
- Pre-Initiation

The idea of having nights designated for specific hazing traditions is not unique to fraternities and sororities. Many different groups have a tradition of the “family drink” where a particular brand of alcohol is expected to be consumed by the new member. The new members drink with their Big Brother or Big Sister and other members of that “Family” to the point that the entire bottle is consumed. This type of tradition can have deadly consequences. It’s been reported that most hazing related accidents and deaths are due to alcohol and binge drinking.

How to Recognize Signs of Hazing

Keep in mind, hazing is usually done in private and in secret. It normally occurs off campus. Rarely does anyone see what is happening at three o'clock in the morning in an off-campus basement, for example. So, it's not reported and is far more pervasive and more severe than expected.

Besides the behaviors you might see in public; the most notable signs of hazing might be a change in the behavior of someone trying to join the group. The Alfred University study found that 13% of those affected by hazing left the group because of being hazed.

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How to Recognize Signs of Hazing con't

It's not uncommon for the hazing to include sleep deprivation, excessive drinking and extreme physical exertion. These behaviors will affect your mood and wellbeing. So, if you know a person who is in the process of joining a club, team, organization or group who is tired, moody, anxious, depressed, disheveled or their general presentation is out of character, it is important to ask them what is going on. There may be physical signs of harm like exhaustion, burns, bruises, injuries and most concerning, alcohol poisoning. If they hesitate to explain the noticeable changes, then you might want to ask them about hazing and tell them you're concerned. Remember hazing usually occurs in seclusion and new members often must vow secrecy

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Questions to Ask Yourself

Sometimes it can be hard to know if your group is hazing new members. If you aren't sure, think about the following questions:

Is alcohol involved?

Will active or current members of the group refuse to participate with the new members and do exactly what they're being asked to do?

Does the activity risk emotional or physical abuse?

Is there risk of injury or a question of safety?

Do you have any reservations describing the activity to your parents, a professor or University official?

Would you object to the activity being photographed for the school newspaper or filmed by a TV news crew?

If the answer to any of these questions is yes, the activity is probably hazing.

Adapted from www.stophazing.org

Effects of Hazing

A key finding in the study by Doctors Allen and Madden was that, out of the fifty-five percent of college students that have experienced hazing activities, only five percent of students that were subjected to these activities actually labeled their experience as hazing. They may have said they were required to drink a significant amount of alcohol, eat vile substances, do line-ups or other common hazing behaviors as part of joining the team, club, or group – but they labeled it as an initiation, tradition or even fun.

Because of the strong need to belong and be part of a group, club or team, the effects of hazing are frequently rationalized as a rite of passage or initiation. Oftentimes, the effects of hazing are ignored or minimized because it seems as though everyone else was a willing participant so the impact must not be that big of a deal.

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Misperceptions of Hazing

Many victims will talk about the “positive” outcomes that resulting from their hazing experience. It can be very challenging for some to see the risks associated with hazing. Unfortunately, these individuals may be adamant about not reporting hazing if they saw it or experienced it themselves.

As you can see, the effort to end hazing is challenging when most would not report being hazed or viewing someone else being hazed; unfortunately, many view hazing as fun and do not define hazing behaviors as hazing.

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Misperceptions of Hazing con't

Let's get something straight, hazing is harmful and its effects are not always visible. Research tells us that hazing can have a long-lasting emotional impact. The sometimes hidden harm may come out in psychological symptoms such as anxiety, anger, depression, shame and/or embarrassment. The effects of being hazed can last for a significant period and can really shape a person's identity.

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Consequences of Hazing

There can be significant criminal, civil and academic consequences for individuals found guilty of hazing.

While not every state has an anti-hazing law, hazing does **occur** in every state and so it becomes problematic when trying to have a consistent and standardized definition of hazing behaviors. Since the late 1970s, hazing has gained more publicity and national attention – tragically, because of hazing deaths.

Most states have attempted to strengthen the laws that are on the books by passing anti-hazing laws that are punishable as a misdemeanor, while a handful of states consider hazing a felony if there is significant injury or death. Not only have some of these states made hazing a felony, but at least one also holds the hazing activity planners responsible for their behavior, even if they are not actively involved in the actual hazing act.

To find more information on your state's hazing laws, please see the Resources section of this course for a link.

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Consequences of Hazing con't

There can also be significant consequences for the team, club, or group that is found responsible for hazing. Colleges have forfeited games, suspended clubs and organizations for a certain number of years, and some colleges have completely eliminated Greek Life as a result of a hazing tragedy. If your group, club, team, organization is nationally affiliated, go to their website and search for hazing. Typically, they will have a hazing policy or resources for membership. Your college or university will have the school's hazing policy within the Student Handbook or Code of Conduct.

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Reporting Hazing

And if you or someone you know might be hazed or have been hazed, contact the National Anti-Hazing Hotline at 1-888-NOT-HAZE (that is, 1-888-668-4293). Here, you can leave an anonymous message detailing your concerns, or you may provide your personal information for a direct response. A representative from the law firm of Manley Burke monitors the hotline and will forward all messages to the appropriate organization, along with the hazing laws from the relevant jurisdiction. Additionally, most institutions have anonymous reporting options on their websites, so be sure to check those out. Your institution's counseling and health services department can offer confidential services and your Dean of Students Office can explain options.

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Conclusion

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Summary and Implications

If you or someone you know is considering joining a club, group, or organization, be aware of any initiation rituals designed to humiliate, degrade, abuse or endanger your well-being – especially if there's alcohol involved - and report these activities through the proper channels.

It's normal to feel like you want to belong to a group of like-minded individuals, but hazing will not bond you to them. Organizations can choose to plan sanctioned, secure, arduous physical challenges that include the whole group, promote positive networking and develop a cohesive bond amongst members. But membership into any club, organization or team should **not** require being injured or harmed.

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Summary and Implications

The bottom line is that hazing is:

- wrong
- against the law
- against your institution's policy, (and)
- against your group's policy.

Remember, hazing is not a healthy tradition. The effects of hazing can have long term consequences for all involved, and in extreme cases, can include death. Please choose to keep yourself and your classmates safe by not promoting and participating in dangerous, illegal hazing behaviors.

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