

AU Commission Finds Problems With Athletic Team Hazing Are 'Widespread'

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Alfred, NY - Hazing, underage consumption of alcohol, and binge-drinking by members of athletic teams are "more commonplace and serious problems" on the Alfred University campus than anyone suspected-- except the students themselves, according to a report by the Presidential Commission on Athletics. But the 10-member Commission also says it believes the problems are widespread at college campuses across the nation, and that many students, perhaps even a majority, "consumed alcoholic beverages, sometimes heavily, during high school." The Commission, appointed earlier this fall by President Edward G. Coll, Jr., was chaired by Dr. Frank Elliott, an Alfred alumnus and president emeritus of Rider University in New Jersey. "As troublesome as the problems of alcohol abuse and athletic hazing are for Alfred University, we realize that what happened Aug. 29 reflects what is happening... on a national level," Elliott wrote in his report. "We encourage Alfred University, while understandably focusing on its own problems, to attempt to determine the national scope of the problem and to undertake an examination of 'best practices' at other institutions in an effort to bring this problem of athletic hazing to the national forefront." Alfred University is now making plans to implement that recommendation, said Coll. The Commission was charged by Coll with "reviewing all aspects of the Alfred University athletic program and recommending how best to prevent alcohol and hazing abuse" after an Aug. 29 football "rookie party" resulted in two students being hospitalized for acute alcohol intoxication and two others leaving school after being charged with felonies for alleged hazing. "The Commission is satisfied that the description of the 'football party' contained in President Coll's statement of Sept. 1... accurately depicts what happened on the evening of Aug. 29," Elliott wrote. "Illegal drinking and violations of Alfred's hazing policy did occur in the past, as well as on the evening of Aug. 29. Even though student accounts of the incident vary, the Commission believes there was excessive, even life-threatening, consumption of alcohol by underage students at this event." Furthermore, the Commission found that "various initiatory rites, designed to promote or demonstrate bonding or a 'rite of passage,' are also commonplace among athletic teams," with the activities ranging from requiring freshmen to carry team equipment to "actual physical abuse and/or forced behavior designed to embarrass and/or attract attention." The report suggests the athletic director should: coordinate the development and implementation of a series of new traditions, policies, procedures, educational initiatives and assessment techniques; develop a comprehensive Code of Conduct for Alfred athletes; develop a mission statement for Alfred athletics that conforms to the University's strategic plan; foster a greater sense of cohesion among the various teams, and devise methods to integrate athletics into the overall life of the campus. The athletic department should: develop procedures to report and/or intervene in cases of proven or suspected improper and/or illegal off-campus activities on the part of student-athletes, and evaluate the role of part-time coaches, particularly in regard to their ability to be role models and provide leadership to their teams. Coaches should: "impress upon their student-athletes that it is a privilege, rather than a right, to be on a team, and that participants in intercollegiate athletics immediately become unofficial ambassadors for the institution"; excuse freshmen and transfer students from practices so that they may attend orientation sessions with their residence hall peers; make the student-athletes more aware of all University alcohol, drug and hazing policies; monitor their recruiting programs to ensure that prospective students are not exposed to alcohol in a fraternity, residence hall or off campus location when visiting campus; try to avoid recruiting athletes with known behavior problems; work with student-athletes to develop new, acceptable team celebrations to replace the "rookie parties" and develop written guidelines for team captains. Team captains should "understand that their positions are not merely honorific, but entail an obligation to be a role model and leader..." The Student Athletic Advisory Board was charged with "helping to develop a Code of Conduct for the athletic department," and to suggest ways in which student-athletes might be more effectively integrated into the life of the University. The Commission report said the University should: proclaim a zero-tolerance policy for binge-drinking; expand its present alcohol education program; emphasize the need to combat "bystander apathy"; place increased emphasis on informing students of alcohol, drug and hazing policies during residence hall meetings and orientation sessions, and find better ways to communicate those policies to all students; require attendance by all freshmen and transfer students at orientation sessions; and investigate a switch to summer orientation sessions. Furthermore, the University should: develop acceptable traditions for athletic teams, Greek organizations and other student groups; stress consistency in the enforcement of all policies; and develop additional indoor athletic/recreation space for a more active intramural program. "The Commission did a tremendous job in producing this valuable report," said Coll. "The report will be extremely useful to us as we take steps to strengthen our varsity program."