

## **Alfred University: hazing prevalent among high school students**

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ALFRED – Every high school student who joins a group stands a significant risk of being hazed, according to an Alfred University survey, the first-ever effort to measure the prevalence of hazing among American high school students. Results of the survey were announced this morning at a press conference at the National Press Club in Washington, DC. “We found that every high school student who joins any group – from gangs to church groups, from the football team to the band – is at risk of being hazed,” said Dr. Nadine Hoover, principal investigator, who also conducted Alfred University’s 1999 survey of hazing among members of collegiate athletic teams. Alfred University embarked upon the new survey of high school students after its 1999 study showed that 42 percent of the college athletes who said they were hazed to join their college team reported that they had first been hazed in high school; another five percent said they were first hazed in middle school. “We anticipated that we would find some level of hazing among high school groups,” said Hoover. “What we found distressing was the prevalence – 48 percent of all students who join any group in high school are subjected to hazing. Forty-three percent of them reported being subjected to humiliating activities, 23 percent are involved in substance abuse, and 29 percent of them told us they performed potentially illegal acts as part of their initiation.” Hazing is defined as “any humiliating or dangerous activity expected of you to join a group, regardless of your willingness to participate.” Activities such as being yelled, cursed or sworn at; being told to skip school or not associate with others; being forced to eat disgusting things; and tattooing, piercing or shaving themselves or others are considered to be humiliation. Substance abuse activities include drinking alcoholic beverages, smoking, using illegal drugs, participating in drinking contests, and drinking or exercising until the student passes out. Dangerous hazing includes activities such as destroying or vandalizing property; being forced to steal, cheat or commit a crime; being forced to beat up others or being beaten; and being forced to inflict pain on oneself. Even groups most parents consider “safe” haze new members, said Hoover. The greatest numbers of high school students are subjected to hazing for sports, gangs, musical groups and church groups. “The numbers are alarming. Most students in the U.S. are involved in high school sports, and a quarter of them are being hazed. That’s approximately 800,000 high school students a year,” she said. Although high school fraternities and sororities haze almost all of their members (76%), few high school students are involved, Hoover said. “Many more students are involved in church groups than in fraternities or sororities. We know that church groups haze about 24 percent of their new members. Based on that, we project approximately 237,000 high school students are being hazed to join a church group each year. That’s substantially higher than the number hazed to join a high school fraternity or sorority, which is approximately 155,000 each year.” For Dr. Norman Pollard, director of Alfred University’s Counseling and Student Development Center, one of the major concerns is the effect of hazing on students. “Seventy-five (75) percent of the students who were hazed reported negative consequences, from getting into fights with their parents or other students, to being injured, to doing poorly in school,” said Pollard. “This is something we have to be concerned about,” he said. “When we look at recent incidents of violence in high schools, such as those at Columbine, Paducah, and Springfield, we see the dire consequences of teens feeling excluded, rejected and humiliated. The young men who committed those acts of violence felt as though they did not belong, and they acted violently against the very institution that is supposed to be inclusive and safe for them.” The Alfred University study also found that 25 percent of those who reported being hazed said they were first subjected to hazing before the age of 13. “Worse, those who are hazed in high school, or even younger, are carrying the effects of that experience with them into college and beyond,” said Pollard. “The prevalence of hazing in high school should be a serious concern to all of us in higher education,” said Dr. Charles M. Edmondson, president of Alfred University. “Colleges and universities have long considered hazing to be a problem, and they have worked hard to prevent it. This study reveals that our challenge is much greater than anyone appreciated. It shows that students may already be deeply immersed in the culture of hazing before they arrive on our campuses as freshmen.” Too often, said Dr. Robert Myers, a professor of anthropology and public health at Alfred University, “Our culture views hazing as ‘fun and exciting.’ That’s the primary reason students gave for why they participated in hazing, even for dangerous and aggressive forms of hazing. America’s obsession with ‘fun’ apparently gives us license to justify almost any type of behavior, no matter how abusive.” “Students also appear incapable of distinguishing what hazing is,” said Hoover. “Fourteen percent said they were hazed, but 48 percent told us they participated in behavior that is clearly defined as hazing, and 29 percent did things that are potentially illegal in order to join a group.” Alfred University researchers said they are also alarmed by what the study reveals about the role

of adults. “Students are more likely to be hazed if they knew an adult who was hazed,” said Hoover. “That leads us to believe that adults condone hazing, and their attitude is being conveyed to the students. Worse, when students are hazed, they believe there is no one they can tell, or that the adults who should be protecting them would not know how to handle a report of hazing.” Other notable findings: • Both male and female students report high levels of hazing, but male students are at highest risk, particularly for dangerous hazing. • The lower a student’s grade-point average, the greater his or her risk of being hazed. The entire study is available online at: <http://www.alfred.edu/new...>