

# The Cornell Daily Sun

ITHACA, NEW YORK, THURSDAY, MARCH 15, 2007

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### Effects of Hazing Last Long After Pledging Process

By **Noah Grynberg**

Sun News Editor

Jan 26 2007

Adam Zwecker '04 stood tired and barefoot on shards of broken glass with the rest of his fraternity pledge class. For seven hours, Zwecker and his pledge mates had been pelted by eggs and forced to do push-ups by the brothers at his chosen fraternity, activities designed to initiate aspiring members into the organization. The exercise may sound extreme, but it was just another night of hazing for a pledge class in 2001.

“That was one of the nights when you go home and you wonder, ‘What the hell am I doing?’” Zwecker said. “The frat brothers tried to justify it by saying that it would build unity for us, but it was kind of just a stupid, gross experience.”

Zwecker’s story is posted in detail at [hazing.cornell.edu](http://hazing.cornell.edu), a University-operated website designed to foster community awareness about the incidence of hazing on campus. Hazing incidents like those experienced by Zwecker would ultimately inspire Susan Murphy, vice president for student and services, to appoint a Task Force on Hazing in 2001. That group would eventually recommend the launch of the University’s hazing website four years later.

Along with an account of Zwecker’s experience, originally compiled by Zwecker himself as part of an independent study research project in 2003, the site also features a list of recent hazing violations and a mechanism for making anonymous reports of hazing to University officials. Tim Marchell, director of mental health initiatives at Gannett Health Services, played an integral role in the development of the website. He explained that hazing is an important issue that continues to affect the Cornell campus and that the issue needed to be addressed in the public sphere.

“Hazing is not unique to Cornell, but we believe that it is important to face this issue

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openly," Marchell said. "Hazing is unacceptable and contrary to the values and mission of the University."

Hazing incidents, Marchell continued, often go unreported because of the secrecy that pervades many of the organizations that engage in hazing activity. According to Marchell, the University's website is designed to undermine that secrecy and get the reality of hazing into the open.

"The site examines hazing explicitly in an attempt to overcome the secrecy that perpetuates these practices," Marchell said.

Marchell explained that hazing can take many forms but is generally associated with any activity that compels an individual to take physical risk or that causes an individual mental distress or physical harm. Often, he said, an individual will be harmed by an activity that others may consider acceptable.

"Hazing affects individuals differently and can cause 'hidden harm,'" Marchell said. "When someone is hazed, no one checks to see whether they suffer from depression or were abused as a child."

Travis Apgar, associate dean of students for fraternity and sorority affairs, agreed with Marchell's assessment. He explained that although some people may have the capacity to deal with a certain level of physical or mental abuse, others may not be able to deal with the same kind of treatment. Just as some people have a higher tolerance for alcohol than others, some individuals will have a higher relative threshold for hazing.

"We're okay with unity-building activities that are positive," Apgar said. "The problem is that people think that hazing is positive, when in reality it's not."

Apgar explained that his department has worked with the leaders of student-run organizations on campus in an effort to develop unity-building exercises that can serve as alternatives to hazing.

"We're willing to sit down with people and see how they can morph some traditional activities into positive activities for those involved," Apgar said. "There are too many ways to achieve the same goals that hazing hopes to achieve [for hazing to continue] on campus."

Lambda Phi Epsilon is one fraternity that has worked closely with both Apgar and Marchell in an effort to find alternatives to hazing for its pledge process. Cited twice at [hazing.cornell.edu](http://hazing.cornell.edu) for hazing violations that occurred in the spring of 2006, Lambda Phi has reformed its pledge process and ensured that pledge activities now take place within a controlled environment.

"A lot of the stuff that we talked about with Tim [Marchell] would work really well for

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what we're trying to accomplish," said Paul Lee '07, president of Lambda Phi. "The brothers were actually surprised by what is allowed in a controlled environment. They realized that these were ways to keep traditions alive without getting in trouble."

As Judicial Administrator Mary Beth Grant explained, traditions like those at Lambda Phi, are a big part of many organizations on campus. Student-run groups from sports teams to fraternities in the Greek system have all been found in violation of hazing in the past, and hazing within all student groups remains a constant concern for the University.

"Hazing occurs in a capella groups, sports teams — it's not just the Greek system," Grant said. "We know that for any kind of activity, not everything is reported to the J.A.'s office."

The underreporting of hazing may be due at least in part to an uncertainty about the definition of hazing among college students. In 2005, a study conducted by Shelly Campo, Gretchen Poulos '02 and John W. Sipple was published in The American Journal of Health Behavior that detailed the incidence of hazing at Cornell. The survey of 736 Cornell undergraduates found that 1 in 3 respondents reported engaging in activity that would be considered hazing under the University's rubric, but only 1 in 9 individuals responded that they had been subjected to hazing in the past. The study showed that students often fail to recognize that hazing is occurring, even while they participate in an activity that would be considered hazing by the University.

David Cronheim '07, the former president of Lambda Chi Alpha fraternity, agreed that hazing is not always recognized as such by the participants. Cornell cited Lambda Chi for a hazing violation that involved the kidnapping of a fraternity brother, an activity that, according to Cronheim, should never have been considered hazing by the University.

"A couple of pledges decided that it would be funny to kidnap one of the [brothers]," Cronheim said. "[This was not hazing], because there's no way that pledges can haze a brother."

Additionally, Cronheim contended that his fraternity was misled by the Judicial Administrator into thinking that the incident would not be considered a hazing violation.

"The board said, 'We really don't think that this was hazing,'" Cronheim explained. "Then, the J.A. says it will be posted on the web site. It makes me mad, because there's a lot of fraternities that do some really bad things and they turn a blind eye."

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Cronheim contended that hazing occurs because fraternity brothers and members of other organizations want to prove their relative toughness.

“People think that hazing is cool,” Cronheim said. “Some people even said, ‘Leave the [hazing violation] up there [on the website]. It’ll make us seem more badass.’”

Zwecker agreed with Cronheim’s statement. Hazing, he explained, is often another way for fraternities and other student-run groups to compete against peer organizations on campus.

“Part of it is tradition,” Zwecker said, “Kind of like, ‘We did this, so you should do this too.’ Also it’s that everyone is trying to prove that they’re badder or tougher than everyone else.”

According to Apgar, hazing often continues because people are afraid to change the traditions that have served to prove their toughness in the past. Those people need to realize, he explained, that pledging should be a positive experience for everyone involved.

“Pledging should be something that brings you into the group in a positive way,” Apgar said. “When your boss asks you about the best team-building exercise you learned about in college, you don’t want to be the guy that says, ‘We should all get together and see how fast we can down a keg.’ You want to learn about a better team-building exercise that you can use in the future.”

By **Noah Grynberg** at Jan 26 2007 - 1:31am | **Top Story** | **News Story**

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### Response to critics

I read this article as well as the response below. I am compelled to point out that the supposed "pledge brother" who refutes these comments declines to provide his full name. I don't know much about the article, and I can't pretend I was there, but I think anyone who is trying to take away from the value of what one man did for the university, and in effect contribute to the secrecy and perpetuation of hazing, should also be brave enough to put his whole name down along with his reply.

By Concerned Reader (not verified) at January 28, 2007 - 1:40pm | [reply](#)

### A half-truth is the most cowardly of lies

I too was in Adam Zwecker's pledge class, and when I read his hazing essay I was taken aback by his horribly false recollections of events that I participated in during my time as a pledge. In every story he applies a fictional, caustic twist that severs any link to actual events that occurred during the spring of 2001. In many stories, no such link even exists in the first place. For example, allow me to rebut the anecdote cited in this article regarding "standing barefoot on shards of broken glass":

I am only aware of a single event during my time as a pledge where any pledge was ever in contact with broken glass: One of my friends cut his hand on a single piece of a bottle that wasn't properly cleaned up after a party. This single shard was not related at all to any pledge activity and its presence was completely unknown to all the brothers and pledges; the resulting utterly minor cut was a complete accident. This event bears such little resemblance to Mr. Zwecker's chimerical tale that I'm not sure if he tried to base it on this event, or if his account is a pure lie. Perhaps his story was conjured from the fictional hazing event in the movie "Van Wilder".

Let me be absolutely clear: at no point was I ever barefoot during pledging, at no point was I standing on or thought I was standing on broken glass, and at no point did I ever think I was in danger of any injury whatsoever. The anecdote from the article is completely and utterly untrue. Every such anecdote in Mr. Zwecker's article would similarly rot in the light of the truth. Serious scrutiny would render the personal accounts in his essay void.

Unfortunately, the community and the university will unlikely ever bring this scrutiny upon him and instead accept his tale at face value, thinking "Why would he make this up?" The guilty-until-proven-innocent nature of this type of allegation will uphold his slander and silence his critics. Regarding the anonymity of those that speak against his untruths: who wants to walk in front of the spewed bile of a liar to defend himself against false accusations?

By Another Pledge Brother (not verified) at January 29, 2007 - 3:20pm | [reply](#)

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**Nelson the real problem**

I happen to have been a colleague of Mr. Zwecker's at Cornell and I can say that I have read his paper - while I am not in agreement with the sometimes aggressive and "gotcha" style with which he chose to write his story, no reasonable person can dispute the factual claims he asserts therein.

As a person who was influential on the IFC, I can say without equivocation that the real problem is Ms. Suzy Nelson. Her tough-talk, no-act policies, grounded on punishment and not prevention serve only to expose vulnerable pledges to additional dangers. Working with Ms. Nelson numerous times over a two year span, I found her to be an uninspiring if not dissingenuous administrator. Simply stated, Ms. Nelson's policy towards hazing was more "don't ask, don't tell" than one of substance. Even if a fraternity was caught, if the alumni were powerful enough Ms. Nelson would allow the house off with a proverbial wrist slap (see: Chi Psi)

By matt201083 (not verified) at January 30, 2007 - 10:19pm | [reply](#)

**Ms. Nelson the real problem**

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By matt023847 (not verified) at January 30, 2007 - 10:20pm | [reply](#)

**Overboard criticisms**

I also was a pledge brother of Mr. Zwecker's. Although I don't necessary agree that all hazing is bad, I will be the one to admit that a number of the things that he wrote about did take place. I understand why people claiming to be pledge brothers are saying otherwise but I think it's gone too far.

By Honest Brother (not verified) at January 31, 2007 - 11:10pm | [reply](#)

### Travis Apgar

<http://www.campuspeak.com/speakers/apgar/>

I am deeply disappointed with the new choice for assistant dean of students in OFSA, Travis Apgar. This is an emotionally unstable and scarred man that has a vendetta against Fraternities and Greek Life in general. His past experiences mean that he can never have an unbiased opinion about the cases that are brought before him. I feel his appointment was made in an effort by the Cornell administration to systematically remove the Greek organizations currently present.

Also, to place him at the head of decisions regarding issues dealing with minority Greeks is ridiculous. He has no knowledge of the minority Greek system, which is completely different in its very nature from traditional fraternities. Punishments dealt to minority Greeks have a magnified effect because their rushing methods and applicant pool are completely different from those organizations in IFC.

By bob cobb (not verified) at February 2, 2007 - 8:38am | [reply](#)

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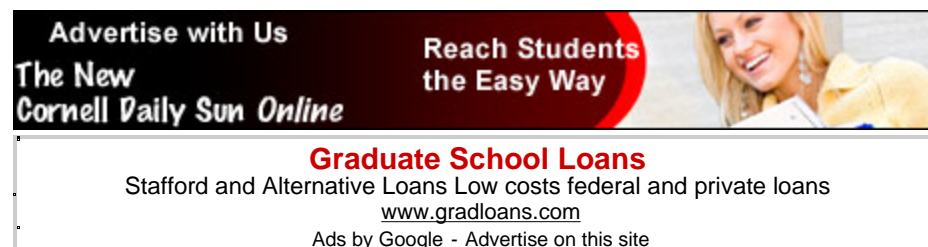
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