

# A Comprehensive Approach to Hazing Prevention in Higher Education Settings

*Working Paper, May 23, 2008<sup>1</sup>*

Linda Langford, Sc.D.  
linda@lindalangford.org

The Higher Education Center's 2002 publication "Preventing Violence and Promoting Safety in Higher Education Settings: Overview of a Comprehensive Approach," outlines a framework for addressing a broad array of violence issues in college and university communities.<sup>1</sup> This document outlines specific considerations in applying this approach to the issue of hazing.

## The Center's Comprehensive Approach

Campuses are diverse settings, and there is no "model" hazing prevention initiative that will work at every institution. Accordingly, the Center recommends a set of *principles* and a *process* that campus and community members can use to collaborate on issues like hazing. This approach allows planning groups to create a hazing initiative that is tailored to their campus circumstances and to the needs of specific groups that may experience hazing.

## Principles for Designing Effective Campus Violence Interventions

In general, violence prevention interventions should be

- **prevention-focused** in addition to response-focused
- **comprehensive**, addressing multiple types of violence, all campus constituents, and on- and off-campus settings
- **planned and evaluated**, using a systematic process to design, implement, and evaluate the initiative
- **strategic and targeted**, addressing priority problems (and their risk and protective factors) identified through an assessment of local problems and assets
- **research-based**, informed by current research literature and theory
- **multicomponent**, using multiple strategies
- **coordinated and synergistic**, ensuring that efforts complement and reinforce each other
- **multisectoral and collaborative**, involving key campus stakeholders and disciplines
- **supported** by infrastructure, institutional commitment, and systems

## Strategic Planning Process

The most effective violence prevention programs result from systematic planning efforts that involve multiple campus and community partners working together in a task force or coalition.<sup>2</sup> Initial planning steps include assessing local assets, problems, and existing programs; reviewing national research; and collecting local data. The planning group then uses this information to guide the development of a strategic plan that is tailored to the needs and assets of the local

---

<sup>1</sup> The resources were last updated March 31, 2013. This working paper may be revised periodically. Please contact the author at [linda@lindalangford.org](mailto:linda@lindalangford.org) for the most recent version. This working paper was developed when Linda Langford was an associate Center director at the U.S. Department of Education's Higher Education Center for Alcohol, Drug Abuse and Violence Prevention, which no longer exists. Dr. Langford is grateful to the Department for their long-standing support for hazing prevention work.

campus community. Because a comprehensive plan will include multiple components, it is helpful to specify both immediate and longer-term goals to guide program implementation. In addition, it is important to build in a plan for evaluating program success. Finally, a key task of the strategic planning process is ensuring that all of the programs, policies, and services in the plan are coordinated and mutually reinforcing.

## Applying the Center's Framework to Hazing Prevention

### Key Recommendations

Based on the Center's framework, the following key actions are recommended for creating a comprehensive hazing initiative.

- (1) Identify and address multiple contributing factors.** Like other violence issues, hazing is caused by the convergence of numerous factors across multiple levels of influence. Examples at each level include:

  - *Individual* student factors, such as attitudes and beliefs supportive of hazing; prior exposure to hazing.
  - *Peer and group-level* factors, such as perceived peer norms about hazing (peer factor); enforcement of organizational policies prohibiting hazing (group factor).
  - *Institutional* factors, including the existence and enforcement of campus-level hazing policies; adequate oversight of organizations by campus officials.
  - *Community* factors, such as the prevalence of local high school hazing; support for hazing by local alumni.
  - *Public policy and societal* influences, including the presence and enforcement of state and federal hazing laws; cultural beliefs in the value of surviving adversity.

Efforts to reduce hazing will require addressing an array of contributing factors through multiple programs, policies, and services.
- (2) Conduct a local analysis.** There is no one-size-fits-all solution to hazing. A thorough analysis of local hazing behaviors and contributing factors enables planning teams to develop solutions appropriate to their campus. Collecting data can also be an effective way to engage stakeholders such as faculty members and students in the coalition.<sup>3</sup>

An important task of the local analysis is to identify the specific factors at each level of influence that enhance or inhibit the risk of hazing in the campus environment and in specific groups. For example, in which groups is hazing most common, and why? What institutional and group hazing traditions exist, and what supports them? What beliefs and attitudes do students hold that perpetuate hazing or inhibit intervention? What beliefs or values exist that protect against hazing, and how might these be supported and strengthened? It also is important to conduct an inventory of current programs, policies, resources, and assets. Where do they need strengthening? What resources can be mobilized? The answers to these questions will help the coalition to pinpoint local contributors to hazing and to devise targeted solutions.
- (3) Include prevention, early intervention, and response components.** Campus-based hazing initiatives must include measures designed to *respond* to hazing incidents,

including policies and protocols for reporting, investigating, and sanctioning offenses, and monitoring sanctions that are imposed. A comprehensive approach also will include complementary efforts aimed at *early intervention* in hazing behaviors and *prevention* of hazing incidents—that is, efforts to intervene early in hazing behavior and to stop hazing from occurring in the first place by targeting underlying causes and creating safe and secure environments.

- (4) **Use multiple, coordinated, and sustained strategies.** Given the many causes of hazing, a comprehensive program will include many approaches such as the following:
- Addressing attitudes, beliefs, perceptions, and skills that contribute to hazing through education, skill building, curriculum infusion, and other efforts.
  - Supporting healthy group norms and promoting bystander intervention.
  - Conveying clear expectations for conduct among students, faculty, staff, organizational leaders, alumni, parents, and visitors.
  - Creating and disseminating comprehensive policies and procedures addressing hazing, and instituting training programs to ensure that members of organizations, student leaders, alumni, advisors, campus safety, judicial affairs staff, and all other relevant stakeholders know their roles and responsibilities in following and enforcing the policies.
  - Providing a range of support services for students who have experienced hazing.
  - Establishing comprehensive alcohol and other drug prevention programs targeting both organizations and the general campus and community environment.
- (5) **Make sure programs, policies, and services are coordinated and synergistic.** One-shot programs are not effective in making sustained change. Therefore, it is critical to encourage the development of an overall initiative in which multiple program and policy components reinforce one another. Coordination and synergy should be sought among the diverse hazing prevention efforts undertaken by each campus organization and also campus wide, among efforts that cut across organizations.
- (6) **Ensure that each component of the initiative has clearly defined goals and objectives that are informed by data and research.** Implementation of the strategic plan is facilitated when each program, policy, or service has clearly defined goals and objectives that specify the outcomes or *changes* they are intended to make. Goals and objectives articulate which contributing factors are targeted for change, taking into account research on the causes of hazing, prior evaluation studies, and the coalition’s analysis of local contributing factors. Goals generally reflect broad outcomes, while objectives designate the specific end results that each program or policy is expected to accomplish within a given time period. Objectives should be “S.M.A.R.T.”: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-Bound. Setting up objectives in this way aids in devising a plan to evaluate whether they were achieved.
- (7) **Build Collaborations.** As noted above, comprehensive approaches to hazing include multiple interrelated components, including policy development, disciplinary responses, prevention programs, staff training, law enforcement efforts, counseling services, and other efforts. These activities typically fall across campus departments, community

stakeholders, and national organizations, and thus responsibility for hazing prevention efforts cannot be the sole responsibility of one department or group. Support and leadership from administrators is essential for promoting coordination among hazing prevention program elements.

## **Recent Developments in the Field**

Two relatively recent developments have the potential to help the higher education field improve its hazing prevention efforts. First, there is a growing body of knowledge about what works in campus prevention generally that can be applied to hazing prevention efforts. Second, new research on the extent, nature, and determinants of hazing can be used to shape hazing programs, policies, and services.

## **The Growing Evidence Base in Campus Prevention**

New research continues to emerge about effective prevention of other campus health and safety problems, and the field of hazing prevention can benefit from this knowledge. For example, the recent publication “Experiences in Effective Prevention: The U.S. Department of Education's Alcohol and Other Drug Prevention Models on College Campuses Grants” reviews and synthesizes information gained from site visits of successful alcohol and other drug (AOD) prevention program to identify their common characteristics.<sup>4</sup> The core elements identified by this review reinforce key prevention processes that also are applicable to hazing prevention work:

- Exercising leadership,
- Building coalitions,
- Choosing evidence-based programs,
- Implementing strategic planning,
- Conducting a program evaluation,
- Working toward sustainability, and
- Taking the long view.

This publication compliments the important report on college drinking released in 2002 by the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA), which recommended that schools undertake multi-layered prevention and intervention strategies that are (1) based on a local assessment; (2) guided by research; (3) locally tailored; and (4) evaluated for effectiveness.

The NIAAA report also found that informational and knowledge-based interventions focusing on AOD-related harms are ineffective when used alone.<sup>5</sup> In addition, literature reviews of evaluated campus sexual violence prevention programs suggest that one-time or fragmented programs are ineffective in creating sustained change.<sup>6,7</sup> Taken together, this research supports the need for multiple, sustained hazing prevention efforts that go beyond individual educational programs to address organizational, campus, community, policy, and cultural factors.

## **Emerging National Research on Hazing**

Basing programs and policies on research about the problem and its causes is one important way to improve program effectiveness. Past efforts to address hazing have been hampered by a lack of data about the extent and nature of this problem across an array of student groups as well as a limited understanding of the complex factors that contribute to hazing.

The National Study of Student Hazing is a research study undertaken by researchers from the University of Maine to examine the extent and nature of hazing across multiple student groups at U.S. colleges and universities and to explore student and staff attitudes and beliefs about hazing. The findings of this and other studies can help campus planning teams as they assess local circumstances, design programs and policies, and set specific, measurable objectives for change.

Initial findings from this national study suggest important considerations for interventions:<sup>8</sup> For example:

- Many students who have experienced specific hazing behaviors did not consider themselves to have been hazed.
- Hazing activities occur across a wide range of student groups (e.g. athletics; fraternities/sororities; recreation and sports clubs; band/performing arts organizations.)
- More than two-thirds of students are aware of hazing behaviors in student groups on campus.
- Advisors and coaches are often aware of and/or involved in student hazing.
- Fewer than half of students were provided with anti-hazing policies when they joined an organization; if warnings were given, they were sometimes vague.
- Many students come to college having experienced hazing in high school.

Each finding can help shape appropriate responses to hazing. For example, the fact that hazing occurs across many types of student groups suggests that prevention efforts cannot be limited to fraternities and sororities or athletic teams. A comprehensive hazing effort will encompass the full range of groups in which hazing occurs and tailor prevention efforts to fit each group. In addition, efforts will be strengthened if policy, education, and enforcement efforts are consistent and coordinated across student groups, rather than left for each organization to create separately.

Likewise, these data reveal the commonality of witnesses or “bystanders” to hazing behaviors, which suggests that there are missed opportunities for intervention. Each hazing prevention coalition can decide how to apply this information on their campus. Possible responses to these findings might include making sure that policies explicitly prohibit involvement in hazing by coaches/advisors or perhaps requiring them to report about hazing they learn about. In addition, programs might teach advisors, coaches, student leaders, and students the strategies and skills needed to exert leadership in preventing hazing and intervening in hazing incidents.

Of course, national data may not reflect the problem on any individual campus, which is why a local assessment is recommended. However, national data are helpful in understanding the general dynamics of this complex behavior and also can highlight important factors to explore in a campus-specific analysis.

As described above, the initial findings from the National Study of Student Hazing already have increased our knowledge about this issue in important ways. More results will be released as

additional analyses are conducted. In addition, campuses are encouraged evaluate their own hazing prevention efforts to determine their effectiveness. Hazing coalitions are encouraged to review both emerging national research and results of their own evaluation efforts on an ongoing basis and use these findings for program improvement.

## References

1. Langford, L. (2002). *Preventing Violence and Promoting Safety in Higher Education Settings: Overview of a Comprehensive Approach*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education, Higher Education Center for Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse and Violence Prevention.
2. Langford, L.M. and W. DeJong. (2008). *Strategic Planning for Prevention Professionals on Campus*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education, Higher Education Center for Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse and Violence Prevention.
3. Higher Education Center for Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse and Violence Prevention. (2008). *Faculty involvement with prevention data collection*, In *Catalyst* (Spring). U.S. Department of Education. p. 4-5.
4. DeJong, W., et al. (2007). *Experiences in Effective Prevention: The U.S. Department of Education's Alcohol and Other Drug Prevention Models on College Campuses Grants*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Higher Education Center for Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse and Violence Prevention.
5. NIAAA Task Force on College Drinking. (2002). *A Call to Action: Changing the Culture of Drinking at U.S. Colleges*. Bethesda, Maryland: National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism. URL:  
[http://www.collegedrinkingprevention.gov/niaacollegematerials/taskforce/taskforce\\_toc.aspx](http://www.collegedrinkingprevention.gov/niaacollegematerials/taskforce/taskforce_toc.aspx).
6. Anderson, L.A. and S.C. Whiston. (2005). Sexual assault education programs: Meta-analytic examination of their effectiveness. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 29(4), 374-388.
7. Bachar, K. and M. Koss. (2001). *From prevalence to prevention: Closing the gap between what we know about rape and what we do*, In *Sourcebook on Violence Against Women*, C. Renzetti, J. Edleson, and R. Bergen, Editors. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
8. Allan, E.J. and M. Madden. (2008). *Hazing in View: College Students at Risk. Initial Findings from the National Study of Student Hazing*. Orono, ME: The University of Maine. URL:  
<http://www.hazingstudy.org/>.

## For More Information

### **Hazing.Cornell.Edu**

<http://www.hazing.cornell.edu/>

Created for the Cornell community, this site includes helpful general resources about hazing, including a definition, review of causes, advice for members of campus organizations, and information on alternative group bonding activities. There is an anonymous online form for reporting incidents of hazing at Cornell. Other topics include campus collaboration, policies and laws, the continuum of hazing, alcohol and hazing, and research and theory about hazing.

### **HazingPrevention.Org**

HazingPrevention.org provides in-person training events, webinars, information, and resources to build the skills of higher education professionals in effective hazing prevention. Examples of key initiatives include the Novak Institute for Hazing Prevention, National Hazing Prevention Week, and the Zeta Tau Alpha Innovation Award.

### **National Study of Student Hazing**

<http://www.hazingstudy.org>

Includes information about the methodology and findings of this national study based at the University of Maine.

### **Stophazing.org**

This site provides extensive resources on the topic of hazing, including general information (definition, laws, news, myths and facts), resources (e.g., a discussion group, speeches, alternatives), writings, and links to specific information about fraternity, sorority, athletic and military hazing.

### **NCAA Handbook**

[http://counseling.sdes.ucf.edu/docs/hazinghandbook0108\[1\].pdf](http://counseling.sdes.ucf.edu/docs/hazinghandbook0108[1].pdf)

This 2008 handbook is entitled *Building New Traditions: Hazing Prevention in College Athletics*.

*Acknowledgement: The author thanks Alan Berkowitz for his thoughtful comments on an earlier draft of this paper.*