EKU suspends fraternity 8 years for hazing
8-year ouster comes after allegations of hazing

By Ashlee Clark

RICHMOND - The Kappa Alpha Psi fraternity chapter at Eastern Kentucky University is suspended from campus for eight years after an investigation into hazing allegations, according to a letter issued by the EKU official who oversees Greek life.

In the letter, EKU confirms that hazing occurred during the most recent pledge process of the Eta Alpha chapter of Kappa Alpha Psi, but the chapter faculty adviser, president and many members were unaware of the activity.

“We do not believe they were involved, nor did they even know about it,” said Mike Reagle, associate vice president for student affairs at EKU. “It was a small group of students that were a part of the fraternity that knew about it.”

Reagle sent the letter to the executive director of the fraternity on Friday. He said the organization received the letter Monday, and he had yet to receive a response.

According to the letter, the chapter can ask to be rechartered in 2016 if officials can produce documented evidence of a zero-tolerance policy for hazing, have recommendations from EKU and the school's National Pan-Hellenic Council and follow all university guidelines for establishing a new registered student organization.

It can reapply in four years under a special appeals process.

EKU could also punish the individual students involved in the hazing, but no decision has been made, Reagle said.

The hazing investigation began after EKU student Brent Whiteside, 23, was hospitalized March 8 for injuries received while he was a candidate for admission to Kappa Alpha Psi.

Whiteside's family and attorney did not return calls seeking comment Tuesday.

Hazing was officially banned at Kappa Alpha Psi and other black Greek organizations in 1990. But the practice went “underground,” meaning it became more secretive, unregulated and dangerous, experts say.

Richmond police issued warrants last week for three men they say were involved in the hazing. Thomas Barnes, 21, of Richmond was arrested Wednesday and released Friday from the Madison County Detention Center, jail officials said.
Police are still searching for Gabriel M. McLaren, 22, and Alonzo C. McGill, 32, both of Richmond.

According to the criminal complaint, the three suspects struck Whiteside with their fists, a paddle and cane, causing kidney failure. Whiteside spent several days at Central Baptist Hospital in Lexington.

Barnes and McLaren were undergraduates at EKU at the time. McGill is an alumnus.

All three are charged with fourth-degree assault, which carries a penalty of six to 10 months in jail or a $250,000 to $500,000 fine, said Richmond police spokesman Willard Reardon.

“This is not something that I would have ever allowed to happen if I had known about it,” chapter faculty adviser Wardell Johnson said. “We just would not have allowed that to happen.”

EKU initially waited to issue a final report on the investigation until the school received a similar report from the fraternity's national office. But EKU has not received any communication from the fraternity about the organization's progress since the investigation began in March, Reagle wrote.

“The University has repeatedly asked for a copy of this final report and to date (13-plus weeks after the alleged activity) we have still yet to receive any official response from the National Office about these allegations,” Reagle wrote. “It is the judgment of the University that more than ample time has been allotted for (Kappa Alpha Psi) to render a decision on this matter; however, it has not done so.”

Richard Lee Snow, the executive director of Kappa Alpha Psi, did not return calls seeking comment.

EKU will welcome any reports from the fraternity, Reagle said. Any “drastic information” could prompt EKU to re-evaluate its ruling.

This is the second time in recent memory that the chapter has been absent from EKU's campus. Reagle said there was a “membership intake infraction” about 10 years ago within the fraternity, but he did not think it involved hazing. Johnson, the group's adviser, said membership slowly trickled down and no one brought enough attention to the chapter's health.

Johnson helped re-establish the Kappa chapter when he arrived at EKU five years ago.

“It's very disturbing because there was a lot of work, a lot of people working to get the fraternity back on track, back on campus,” he said. “But all is not lost. The university wants our presence there, but they want our presence there following the rules.”

Johnson said members were aware of the fraternity's policy against hazing and signed documents that indicated they knew the consequences of breaking the rules. Johnson said he and the majority of the fraternity's members followed the organization's guidelines.
“You can always say, ‘Where's the adviser or where's the parent?’ But we don't follow grown-ups 24/7,” Johnson said. “You can tell them what the rules are, you can tell them the dangers of certain things, but you have to let them do what they're going to do.”

Johnson said he would still want to participate in the fraternity when the group is allowed back on campus, though changes would have to be made.

“I was everywhere I needed to be, so I thought,” he said. “We need to do even more to make sure the rules are exactly followed.”

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