Hazing popular, survey finds; Over half of students responding said it happened to them.
Milwaukee Journal Sentinel
March 16, 2008
By Erica Perez

More than half of college students in campus organizations have experienced hazing despite the fact that the practice is banned practically everywhere, a new national survey has found.

The study, released last week, didn't limit its focus to the usual suspects - fraternities, sororities and varsity sports teams. Those are still the biggest offenders, with nearly three-quarters of members reporting hazing. But the study also found hazing in club sports (64%), performing arts organizations (56%) and even academic clubs (28%).

Types of hazing activities ranged from benign to extreme. The four most common were drinking games, singing or chanting in public, associating with specific people and not others, and drinking large amounts of alcohol to the point of passing out.

Local students interviewed last week said that by the researchers' definition, they'd been hazed, but in a way they thought was positive.

Marquette University law student Mike Menghini said that as an undergraduate at Franciscan University of Steubenville in Ohio, he was awakened by fellow members of the tennis team for midnight practice, which the study described as hazing.

"I would say it's just part of the camaraderie," he said. "It wasn't something I was forced to do . . . It was just a team thing."

The Marquette men's soccer team makes each new freshman sing a cappella on the bus while everyone cheers or boos, said Daniel Addis, a junior on the team.

"It's pretty embarrassing," Addis said. "It's fun. It's just joking."

Researchers Elizabeth Allan and Mary Madden of the University of Maine's College of Education and Human Development surveyed some 11,000 students at 53 college campuses in 2007. An online survey asked students to indicate what kind of campus organizations they were involved in and then asked whether they had participated in 30 activities that the researchers defined as hazing.

"Hazing is more widespread than I think most people would have assumed," said Allan, the study's principal investigator. "Most people typically associate it with Greek organizations . . . and more recently with athletics . . . but I don't think people think of other types of student organizations and clubs."

The study defines hazing as "any activity expected of someone joining or participating in a group that humiliates, degrades, abuses or endangers them regardless of a person's willingness to participate."
Hazing is not only prohibited by Wisconsin law, but also specifically barred at most universities, which have policies written into their student handbooks or conduct codes.

In 2006, the University of Wisconsin-Madison put the school's marching band on probation for seminude dancing, sexualized banter and shaving one member's head. The year before that, Marquette suspended its men's lacrosse team after the administration determined hazing occurred at a party involving beer, bongs and thongs.

In an interesting wrinkle, the study also found that nine out of 10 students who report experiencing a hazing behavior in college do not consider themselves hazed. More students perceive positive rather than negative results from hazing. Some 31% of the time, students said they felt more a part of the group because of hazing, while hazing made them feel stressed 11% of the time, for example.

Allan said her interviews with roughly 300 students helped explain why many students don't think there's a problem. For many students, hazing implies the use of physical force or causes real physical harm.

"Many students don't take into account the power of coercion," she said.

Even if students don't perceive certain hazing activities as problematic, she said, peer pressure to participate in seemingly harmless hazing behaviors can lead to more hazardous activities.

"It sets up this power dynamic that there are those who are in and those who are out," Allan said. "That can create a slippery slope."

Nearly half of the students reported experiencing at least one hazing behavior while in high school.

UW-Milwaukee senior Laura Voith said she participated in "positive" hazing when she was a student at Shorewood High School.

The school had an event at which upperclassmen would dress younger students in potentially embarrassing clothing, such as Halloween costumes or mismatched outfits.

"From my experience, it was in good fun," Voith said. Now captain of the UWM women's club volleyball team, she said the team plays drinking games but she never forces students to play.

"If they don't want to drink, I don't drink so they have someone to hang out with," Voith said.

55% of college students involved in clubs, teams and organizations experience hazing.

47% of students come to college having experienced hazing.

Nine out of 10 students who have experienced hazing behavior in college do not consider themselves to have been hazed.
Source: National Study of Student Hazing, University of Maine College of Education and Human Development