A UW-Whitewater fraternity has been suspended for three years to try to stop a troubling culture of underage drinking and hazing, an official said Wednesday.

Assistant Dean of Student Life Mary Beth Mackin said the university suspended Tau Kappa Epsilon after learning that alcohol and underage drinking were the central focus of many fraternity events. Many members routinely drank to excess, she said.

Pledges also were forced to eat and drink strange things such as raw onions and prune juice, were yelled at by senior members and made to do exercises, chores and other acts of servitude, she said.

The university started investigating the fraternity after receiving numerous complaints about a party where heavy drinking took place. The review uncovered widespread problems related to alcohol and hazing, Mackin said.

"It became real apparent to us that the only way to ensure student safety was to close the chapter for a number of years," she said. "Our hope is that three years is long enough to remove some of that culture."

The university in Whitewater, about 45 miles southeast of Madison, and the national fraternity organization announced the three-year suspension late Tuesday for unspecified code of conduct violations.

Mackin said the chapter can petition for reinstatement in three years but cannot operate again until after Aug. 15, 2011. If it does return, its house must be free of alcohol for the first two years and the university and national organization will have greater oversight of its recruiting activities.

Some of the roughly 25 fraternity members also face university disciplinary action, which could range from reprimands to expulsion, Mackin said.

The national fraternity organization is also conducting a review and will remove any member that engaged in hazing, alcohol abuse or who lied during the investigation, Vice President John Deckard said.

"These behaviors are very far outside the scopes of our values and why we built this fraternity 108 years ago," he said. "The folks that were responsible for the Whitewater circumstances are not living the code of ethics that were put in place when they joined the organization."
Deckard praised the university and local alumni for creating a strategy that will allow the fraternity to eventually return to campus. The fraternity was determined to "rebuild a group that lives TKE's values," he said.

The Indianapolis-based organization has more than 245,000 members and 270 active chapters and colonies in the U.S. and Canada. The Whitewater chapter had been operating since 1963. Its house suffered a major fire last year and members were living on campus in "satellite" houses, Mackin said.