

Seven Steps to Mitigate Hazing Risks

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Hazing and abuse in athletics at academic institutions have reached a boiling point recently, with high-profile allegations levied at top universities. These incidents are not only painful for those students personally affected, but they can also result in intense media coverage, reputational harm and legal actions.

As recent events have shown, it is imperative for academic institutions to have a plan for both preventing and addressing hazing. The best approach is to be proactive, as no institution is above scrutiny and most, if not all, institutions have room for improvement. In order to help mitigate potential legal, financial and reputational risks, administrators and board trustees at these institutions should consider taking the following steps:

- 1. Analyze Your Institution's Risk Profile:** Evaluate your institution's risk profile, with a focus on prior hazing incidents, remedial efforts since those incidents, relevant media coverage and the history and reputation of any specific sports programs. The goal is to avoid being identified as a repeat offender. Consider evaluating existing and prior complaints to assess whether appropriate measures were taken and spot any patterns that may have been missed.
- 2. Assess Your Culture:** Conduct an internal assessment, whether by way of a "climate survey," internal review or other mechanism, to assess the cultural environment on your campus. Instilling confidence in the process is key here, so consider bringing in an independent third party to conduct the review so that the community can feel assured the review is impartial, credible and anonymized.
- 3. Evaluate and Update Policies:** When reviewing and updating policies that address hazing and related acts of misconduct, (i) consider whether the institution's hazing policy, including its definition of "hazing," is appropriately tailored to encompass the types of incidents that have been recently reported, (ii) identify those individuals responsible for handling such complaints, (iii) establish the timelines and procedures related to such complaints and

(iv) develop communication strategies for appropriate transparency of the institution's response to hazing incidents.

4. **Institute a Mechanism for Receiving Complaints:** Establish a secure and confidential process where students can make formal complaints. If already established, institutions should ensure that such mechanisms are sufficiently publicized, readily accessible, working as intended and regularly audited. With the increased scrutiny on hazing in athletics, it is paramount that appropriate channels are available for students to report hazing incidents.
5. **Form an Internal Task Force:** Create and empower an internal group of properly positioned stakeholders tasked with monitoring and promptly responding to hazing complaints. If initial allegations are substantiated, consider whether to engage third-party investigators and/or outside legal counsel to ensure any further investigation is impartial.
6. **Develop a Response Plan:** Consider developing public-facing tools that are ready at the institution's disposal. Examples may include a PR plan to recognize and acknowledge complaints in a timely manner or procedures for the creation of a public report in the case of serious allegations. It is important to be proactive and not reactive in the face of serious allegations.
7. **Educate Students, Coaches and Staff:** Offer hazing prevention materials and resources, including mandatory hazing prevention trainings, to the community, especially incoming students who can be particularly vulnerable. It is crucial to establish a strong anti-hazing culture on campus, including introducing or reinforcing a zero-tolerance hazing policy.

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Academic institutions that take these steps will be well-positioned to handle future hazing allegations, mitigate risk and set a new standard for culture on campus.

Please do not hesitate to contact us with any questions.



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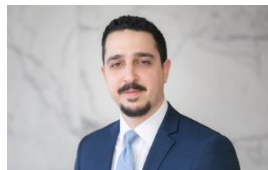
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