

Understanding Hazing

Definition

Hazing is defined as any activity expected of anyone as an explicit or implicit condition of initiation or entry to, affiliation with, or continuing association or membership with a group or organization that humiliates, degrades, abuses, threatens or endangers another regardless of the person's willingness to take part. Hazing is regarded as a non-academic offence under the *Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures*. Depending on the context and circumstances, hazing may also constitute harassment or sexual harassment under the *Policy on Harassment, Sexual Harassment, and Discrimination Prohibited by Law*.

In addition to the direct participation in any inappropriate initiation activities, engaging in their planning or organization, threatening a member of the McGill Community with being subjected to such activities, or attending such events are themselves also regarded as hazing.

A Guide to Identifying Hazing

The following eight questions are a guide to help determine whether or not a planned activity is an appropriate way to welcome new members to your team or club. When answering these questions, it is essential to remember that hazing has subjective impacts. Participants have different values and tolerance thresholds, which means that an activity may be humiliating or demeaning for one person even if the other members of the team/group do not perceive it to be humiliating or demeaning.

If you answer yes to one or more of the following questions, then the activity most likely falls under the definition of hazing. When in doubt, please consult the relevant University administrator.

1. Are participants given the option not to drink if the event involves alcohol?
2. Would senior members of the team or club refuse to do exactly what the first-year or new members are being asked to do?
3. Does the activity involve humiliating, intimidating, or demeaning treatment of the new members?
4. Does the activity risk, threaten, or involve emotional or physical abuse?
5. Is there a risk of injury or a safety concern involved with the planned activity?
6. Would you wear your team uniform in public while participating in the event?
7. Do you have any reservations about describing the activity to your parents, a professor, the Dean of Students, or the Provost?
8. Would you object to the activity being photographed for the McGill Daily or the Tribune, or being filmed by a local TV news crew?

Resources

Office of the Dean of Students Any victim, observer, or person with knowledge about a hazing incident is urged to contact this office at 398-4990.

Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures
http://www.mcgill.ca/files/integrity/Code_of_Student_Conduct.pdf

Handbook of Student Rights and Responsibilities
<http://www.mcgill.ca/files/integrity/greenbookenglish.pdf>

Policy on Harassment, Sexual Harassment, and Discrimination Prohibited by Law
www.mcgill.ca/files/secretariat/harassment-sexualharassment-discrimination.pdf or call an Assessor at 398-4911.

Leadership Development Program, First-Year Office
Offers workshops and consultation with individuals and groups with regard to welcoming and initiation activities.
www.mcgill.ca/firstyear or call 398-6913.

Social Equity and Diversity Education Office
Offers workshops, presentation materials and general consultation on educational activities relating to hazing.
www.mcgill.ca/equity_diversity or call 398-2039.

Case Study

You are a senior member of a women's varsity team and you are very enthusiastic to initiate this year's new team members. After all, you feel that the initiation process forged strong bonds between you and your teammates in previous years. During the course of the first team party, the senior team members require the first-year players to photocopy their breasts so that the photocopies can be sold on campus at a later date to raise money for the team. All of the new members are expected to participate and they willingly agree to do so. Consequently, you are shocked when one of them files a complaint with the Dean of Students alleging that she was hazed during the team party. You are very surprised at the allegations because she voluntarily participated in the activity and the other new players did not feel as though they were hazed that night.

The Issue

Your participation in the planning and carrying out of this initiation constitutes hazing. The activities described in this case study have the strong potential to humiliate, degrade and potentially endanger the players that participated. Selling the photocopies could endanger your teammates by increasing the likelihood that they become targets of sexual harassment and/or assault. Moreover, it is not an excuse that the new members voluntarily engaged in the activity; their willingness to participate plays absolutely no role in determining whether or not the activity constitutes hazing. There are inherent power imbalances that exist when new teammates seek acceptance within a team or group. New teammates often feel the need to endure hazing rituals and 'consent' to participate because they perceive their participation as a condition to gain entrance and social acceptance to the team milieu.

Hazing and the McGill Community

McGill University is committed to creating a hazing-free environment for all of its students. This stance has been adopted to ensure that the values of respect and integrity are upheld in all team and group activities.

Hazing creates a climate of danger, fear, and humiliation, and only hurts long-term team unity and cohesion. All initiation should be limited to welcoming activities that promote and encourage positive group dynamics. These activities should be fun and interesting, but most importantly, they must be safe and respect the dignity, safety, and well-being of individuals. New members should be able to assert their right to not participate without any pressure or fear of retaliation or exclusion from their teammates. Promoting positive team-building activities when welcoming new members will benefit the team/club, its new and existing members, and the McGill University community as a whole.

Assistance is available to McGill clubs, associations, and athletic teams to help create positive team- and group- building activities to welcome new members and to stimulate the continuing allegiance and participation. Examples of positive team-building activities include participation in rope courses, outdoor educational activities, community service projects or a drama night where both current and new members plan and perform non-humiliating skits.