

WSU fraternity punished for conduct violations

Phi Kappa Tau to appeal ruling in Whitman County courts

Shanon Quinn/Moscow-Pullman Daily News

Washington State University recently revoked recognition of the Alpha Kappa chapter of Phi Kappa Tau fraternity for alleged hazing and conduct violations, but the fraternity is refusing to back down and is now preparing to take its case to Whitman County Superior Court.

Roger Sandberg, a Pullman attorney representing the Greek organization, said Tuesday he expects to file an appeal with the court by the end of the week.

After continued appeals within the university, ending most recently with the Office of the President - the highest university level - WSU revoked university recognition of Phi Kappa Tau until Aug. 1, 2017.

The violations, which allegedly took place Aug. 24 during the Greek community's bid day, include abuse of the student conduct system; failure to comply with university officials or law enforcement officers; alcohol and hazing violations of university policy, rules or regulations; and retaliation.

Adam Jussel, director of Student Standards and Accountability at WSU, said his office received a report in late August that alcohol had been provided to and consumed by new, underage members at a fraternity chapter house recognized by the university and one of the new members had been hospitalized.

The office began an investigation and the Conduct Board heard the case in late September, Jussel said.

Phi Kappa Tau appealed the board's decision to the university Appeals Board, which upheld the decision. The Office of the President reviewed the case and upheld the loss of recognition sanction through August 2017, Jussel said.

According to the Daily Evergreen, a fraternity member was hospitalized for a period of three days due to dehydration and nerve damage in one arm as a result of being duct taped to a broom in order to prevent his rolling onto his back while unconscious and choking on his own vomit.

While addressing charges brought forth by the Student Conduct Board, fraternity members pleaded "responsible" to failure to comply, violation of university protocol and alcohol violations, but denied responsibility of retaliation, misuse of conduct system, abuse to self and others and reckless endangerment.

As alcohol was used during a fraternity activity, the charges included hazing.

"Some hazing matters involve the inappropriate use or distribution of alcohol by and to minors, and we respond consistently with the university's policies as they relate to alcohol and hazing. Again, the seriousness of this matter was exacerbated by inappropriate alcohol use that led to the hospitalization of one of our students," Jussel said. "Hazing carries with it the mandatory minimum sanction of loss of recognition under the Standards of Conduct for Students ... and the Revised Code of Washington."

Sandberg said he is disappointed in the university's decision to revoke recognition.

"This would have been an excellent opportunity for the university to provide appropriate education regarding responsible behaviors, to require increased community service and GPA standards," he said. "This would have been a wonderful opportunity for the university to send a positive message to other fraternities and sororities. Instead, the university chose to sever ties with the fraternity and withdraw any support and oversight for these young men, the great majority of whom had nothing to do with any of the decisions that were made on bid day."

Sanberg said he hopes Whitman County Superior Court will overturn the university's decision, but if it does not, there remains the option to appeal to the Washington State Court of Appeals in Spokane. Sandberg did not indicate whether he intends to do so.

For the fraternity, loss of recognition means it cannot house freshmen and will lose its chapter privileges.

Sandberg said the fraternity's lack of recognition will do more harm than good to the university community.

"The members can still have activities, but cannot have activities recognized by the university. The practical effect is that any positive community building, community service, social and other events with other members of the Greek community or other student organizations are not allowed to occur," he said.

As an example, Sandberg said, the fraternity will no longer be able to participate in charity fundraising.

"The fraternity actively supports and raises money for Paul Newman's organization and the Serious Fun Children's Network. Because they are now unrecognized, they cannot continue to raise money for this charity, or even to donate to the charity the money they have already raised. This outcome is not productive for the individual members of the fraternity or the university community in any way," he said.

Jussel said WSU takes hazing seriously due to the risk it poses to students and the university community.

"We do mandatory trainings each year with members of our Greek community so they understand the serious physical, mental and emotional trauma associated with hazing and so they are aware of the consequences of their behavior," Jussel said.

He added this is not the first time the fraternity has been in trouble.

Jussel said Phi Kappa Tau was found responsible for various other violations of the Standards of Conduct for Students surrounding an incident last year in which members refused to permit emergency personnel into the chapter house and to assist an underage woman who was intoxicated.

Neither Sandberg nor Jussel were certain whether the fraternity will be permitted to remain in its house at College Hill since it is not the property of WSU.

"Phi Kappa Tau's national organization will ultimately make the determination as to whether to pull the charter of the local chapter," Jussel said.

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