BOT expands UMaine anti-hazing rules

Rich Garven

University of Maine

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One black female student sits among 200 white students in an Introduction to Anthropology class and the professor is speaking on physical characteristics of races. He singles her out of the class and asks if she has trouble sleeping because of her braided, Bo Derek-style hairdo. She says no, and he replies, "You must have a really soft pillow, but then, they don't have pillows in Africa."

Most people associate hazing as being a physical act performed by fraternities, but the above scene is an example of mental hazing by one person upon another. This type of action is now illegal in the UMaine system.

On Sept. 26 the Board of Trustees revised, in accordance with state law, its hazing policy so that it now covers all faculty, administrators and students within the UMaine system. Previously, the hazing policy applied only to students.

Hazing is defined by the UMaine conduct code as: "any action taken or situation created intentionally by an organization or with the knowledge or consent of any organization to produce mental or physical discomfort, embarrassment, harassment, or ridicule to any member or perspective."

Penalties for hazing violations include: ejection of a person not associated with the institution from campus; suspension or expulsion of any person associated with the institution; and organizations, like fraternities, would lose campus recognition.

BOT member Richard I. Morin said the action taken by the BOT was in compliance with the hazing law passed by the Maine State Legislature in April, 1983. "We adopted a policy as dictated by the law for non-students," Morin said. "Previously our policy only covered students."

Wendy Tripp, conduct officer, said it's hard to define what hazing is. "It (the Student Conduct Code) must be general on hazing to try to cover anything that would endanger a person."

William T. Lucy, associate dean of student activities and organizations, said the Legislature is showing that no one condones hazing in any form. "We have always come down hard on hazing," Lucy said. "Along with alcohol awareness, it's one of the most talked about issues on campus."

Lucy said the university first came out against hazing in the 1880's. At that time the problem was between classes with sophomores hazing freshmen. Fraternities are not affected in any new way by the policy change.

A report by the Committee Halting Useless College Killings said that there were 43 deaths due to hazing between 1970 and 1980. All were a result of fraternity accidents. There has never been a death due to hazing at UMO.