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Prairie View disbands fraternity over death of pledge

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Prairie View A&M officials have disbanded the Phi Beta Sigma fraternity, finding the group violated the university's rules against hazing by ordering strenuous exercise sessions which ended in the death of one 20-year-old pledge in October.

In a recently released report by Prairie View A&M's office of student activities, the university also found the fraternity had attempted a cover-up.

"(The fraternity members) instructed aspirants to deny that any member of the fraternity was present" for the physical training on Oct. 20 when Donnie Wade II died, according to the report.

An autopsy found Wade, who collapsed during the exercise drill, died because of a rare medical syndrome that can be triggered by strenuous exertion. The medical examiner ruled Wade's death was attributed to "acute exertional rhabdomyolysis," a syndrome recently linked to the sudden deaths of military recruits and athletes.

His death was further complicated, the report said, by the "sickle cell trait" that can make some predisposed to this syndrome.

In the Prairie View A&M report, the fraternity's current members are declared to be "not in good standing" with the university and the fraternity is disbanded until 2013.

At that point, the fraternity may reapply to form a new chapter and that chapter would be on probation for a year.

The report found that the fraternity had started membership intake earlier than allowed by the university and that the exercise session on Oct. 20 had exposed students to "unreasonable risk or harm."

Also, the report said the fraternal organization had ignored an earlier university ruling to suspend all membership activities by participating in a Greek Show at Texas A&M University a month after Wade's death.

Fraternity officials could not be reached for comment.

Wade's family has filed a wrongful death lawsuit against the fraternity and its pledge trainer, Marvin Jackson.

According to the lawsuit, Wade was deprived of fluids while undergoing an intense exercise regimen that included "six inchers" (holding his legs 6 inches off the ground), the "snake" (running the bleachers); and "Indian run" (where the last runner has to pass his peers and move to the front) pushups and jumping jacks.

The suit also alleged the systemic hazing had included forcing pledges to live on a strict bread-and-water diet as well paddling.

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