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Researchers pool brainpower at UMaine to fight hazing

By The Maine Campus
October 5, 2009

The University of Maine further established itself this past Thursday and Friday as a national school for hazing-related research when it hosted the sixth annual National Hazing Symposium at the Memorial Union.

Fifty-five researchers from universities across the United States and Canada came together to brainstorm research-based preventative strategies against hazing.

"It's a large task," said UMaine ^[1] Associate Research Professor Mary Madden, "but we have some of the best minds in the room. Knowing that this is a work in progress, what we do in these days will be continued and expanded throughout the next few months. So think of this as a beginning."

For two days, the researchers sat at tables and shared their research findings, asking questions that could lead to hazing prevention strategies.

UMaine Associate Professor of higher education leadership Elizabeth Allan, along with Madden, had the most findings to present.

Allan and Madden conducted a national survey with 52 different universities, 300 interviews and 11,400 respondents. Through their research, they found 55 percent of the students surveyed had experienced different types of hazing in various organizations.

"We found that hazing occurred across a range of student groups, and many people were surprised to learn this because you know the stereotype is often that it's primarily a fraternity or a sorority thing," Allan said. "More recently, we have heard it among athletes, but we saw students responding that they had experienced hazing as a member of club sport teams, performing arts organizations, service clubs, intramural sports and academic clubs and honors societies as well."

Types of hazing activities include alcohol consumption, humiliation, isolation, sleep deprivation and sex acts. Researchers concluded students felt a sense of enjoyment, group bonding and accomplishment from these acts. Allan and Madden's research reported 9 out of 10 students claimed they did not know they were being hazed.

Linda Langford, associate director of the Higher Education Center for Alcohol ^[2] and Other Drug Abuse and Violence Prevention, a part of the U.S. Department of Education, gave opening remarks. She asked if students really understand the policy on hazing or not.

"Is it that they do not know the policy at all? Is it that they know [of] the policy but they do not really know what's in the policy? We have to keep asking ourselves these questions," Langford said.

Allan, Madden and the others hope to promote change within college campuses and from a national standpoint.

"Students recognize hazing as part of the culture, even if they are not in an organization where they participated in hazing or have been hazed," Allan said. "If it [hazing] doesn't involve the physical force, they don't necessarily see the power dynamics operating, and therefore, in their mind, it might not be hazing."

The session ended Thursday evening with a showing of the movie "Hazed," which focuses on the story of Gordie Bailey — a young man who was killed during a hazing event while trying to exceed the limit of alcohol consumption his fraternity brothers set for him.

Bailey's case is one of many, a fact not lost on UMaine. Sept. 21 to Sept. 27 was National Hazing Prevention and Safety Week, and the university held its annual signing of its hazing prevention statement Sept. 24.

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[1] UMaine: <http://mainecampus.com/tag/umaine>

[2] Alcohol: <http://mainecampus.com/tag/alcohol>

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