Hazing Case Studies

The case studies below are not a part of the Bowdoin College Hazing Policy and are only offered for the educational purposes of prompting discussion and clarifying students’ understanding of what is hazing and what is not. Some of the situations described would constitute hazing under Bowdoin’s Hazing Policy and others would not.

1. The Captains of a women’s athletic team created a chem-free team-bonding opportunity for their first-years in the form of a scavenger hunt. The Captains texted first-years, informing them to clear their calendars and arrive at an off-campus apartment at 9:00 p.m. on Saturday night. When everyone arrived, the Captains told them this event was optional. No one opted out. The first-years were divided into two groups and given the first of four clues that would take them around campus, where they found the following items: personal lubricant; a condom; a tube of lipstick and the name of a member of the men’s swim team with whom they were to take a picture, incorporating the first three items, and the male swimmer in his Speedo. The Captains thought that because alcohol was not involved, this would be a fine bonding activity and not violate the Bowdoin College Hazing Policy.

The scavenger hunt violates Bowdoin’s Hazing Policy. The Captains have formal power (in their role as Captains) and personal power (as older members of the team), making it far less likely any first-years will feel comfortable to opt out of the scavenger hunt. The first three scavenger hunt items imply a sexual element, and by requiring a photo with a man in a Speedo, the task further suggests sex is an expected part of the outcome. Red flags for this event are that it singles out first years and it has a strong sexual element. Students often think making something optional is the best way to avoid hazing when in fact, this suggests the Captains suspected the event could be construed as hazing. If all members had participated equally, if the items were not sexual in nature, and the scavenger hunt did not create fear for anyone on the team, this would have been a good bonding opportunity and would not have violated the hazing policy.

2. The Quidditch Team is a quirky yet popular club sport at the College. The seven-player team recently took on two new members, a first-year and a junior. At the first meeting, the agenda was focused on how the team would collectively celebrate the new members. In the end, they chose to watch all eight Harry Potter movies consecutively, in costume, and while playing a Harry Potter drinking game (drink once when someone says, “Potter”; drink twice when someone says “Voldemort”, etc…). After the movies, the team headed to the dining hall. Before they could eat, all members, now drunk, stood on their chairs and yelled, “Expecto Patronum!” for which they received a standing ovation from a crowded dining room. The junior cited this tradition as the reason she decided to join the Quidditch Team.

This is not a violation of Bowdoin’s Hazing Policy. All members participated equally regardless of class year or role within the club (including during the planning stages); neither admission nor continued acceptance in the group were dependent on participation; no members were
singled out at any point. The drinking game violates the alcohol policy and the public
drunkenness and yelling are disruptive to other students, but the evening’s events do not violate
the hazing policy. If the new members had been singled out by upper class students at any point
(to dress in costume, to play the drinking game, or yell in the cafeteria), that would be
considered hazing.

3. Two upper-class members of a women’s club team emailed their first-years directing them to
show up at a campus apartment the following Thursday at midnight. They were told to bring a
bathing suit, a black sharpie marker, and a six-pack of beer. They might want to spend extra time
at the gym that week, the email chided. A rumor quickly circulated that upper-class students
would use the markers to circle the first-years’ body fat. When they arrived, first-years were
surprised to find a party waiting for them that did not include wearing the bathing suits or having
their bodies drawn on. The upper-class students felt they brought the younger members closer
without having broken any College policies.

This is a violation of Bowdoin’s Hazing Policy. Although they did not carry out the plan, upper-
class students later reported that they “only wanted to scare” the younger students. The hazing
policy clearly prohibits activities that could psychologically embarrass or demean, the clear
intent and effect of the email. First-year students were singled out, also a violation of the hazing
policy.

4. In the 1980’s, a student organization initiated new members by blindfolding them, driving
them to a remote location at night, and directing them to find their way back to a campus party in
their honor. Historically, each student was left with, and expected to drink, a fifth of alcohol.
Under pressure from alumni, current members revived this tradition but built in safeguards:
students were driven around town for 20-minutes to disorient them and then dropped in an
unfamiliar but adjacent spot with a six-pack of beer which they were told to consume before
returning. Older students were also posted nearby to ensure the new members’ safety. In fact,
when the temperature started to drop, the older students took pity and drove the stranded students
to the campus party. All members were proud that they maintained the spirit of the original
initiation while watching out for the newer students.

This is a violation of Bowdoin’s Hazing Policy. Although better than their predecessors’ event,
the lessened severity does not absolve the organizers from being adjudicated for hazing. Current
members violated the hazing policy by: singling out new members; requiring students to drink
alcohol; and by working to evoke the fear of being lost among new members, none of whom were
aware of the safeguards.

5. Each semester a student organization crowns the member who can drink the most hard
alcohol without throwing up or being transported. The reigning champion must defend the title
against all comers prior to a College House party within the first few weeks of school. During the
drinking contest, student judges remain sober as a safeguard against alcohol poisoning or other
trouble. In the last three years, the winners have been a mix of first-year and upper-class students which causes students to believe they are operating within the current hazing policy.

This activity does not violate the Bowdoin College Hazing Policy. This challenge is not required for admission or continued acceptance in the group and is open to all members, so although dangerous and misguided, it is not a hazing violation. Hard alcohol, drinking games and underage drinking are all prohibited under the Bowdoin College Alcohol Policy. This could quickly become a hazing activity if all new members were expected to challenge the champion each semester and upper class students served only as organizers and sober judges. And, if most or all current members participated in this rite as part of their entry to the student organization, it would be very difficult for new members to perceive the event as optional.

6. Five students on the wrestling team sat around a table at Pine Street Apartments. There were two first years, a sophomore, a junior, and a senior. The teammates played quarters with a handle of Jack Daniels and a shot glass. The game continued until the handle was drained, but not before two students vomited and headed back to their rooms. The three other students passed out and were later discovered by friends who called Security because they were concerned about the drinkers. Two of the three were transported to the hospital with dangerously high blood alcohol levels.

This does not constitute hazing. There is no evidence that anyone was pressured to play and no members were included or excluded based on class year or time on the team. Although multiple campus policies were violated (underage drinking, drinking games, and the use of hard alcohol) and students were in physical danger, this example does not describe hazing. It would be considered hazing if the first years were expected to finish the handle as an initiation to the team.

7. A men’s athletic team ended its season on a high note and held a party to celebrate. Although the prom theme party was open to all students, members of the team were required by the captains to arrive together in same-sex couples, with upper class students dressed in tuxedos and first years dressed in drag. Most first years enlisted women friends from their dorms to help with hair, make up and clothing, which the men reported to be as fun as the subsequent event. Because the party was open to the entire campus and many other male students wore women’s clothing, the first-years said they did not feel singled out by this assignment.

This event does constitute hazing according to the Bowdoin College Hazing Policy. Although the event was open to all students and some non-team members voluntarily chose to dress as women, the first-year members of the team were singled out and required to dress in different, more ridiculous clothing than upper-class students, which is a violation of the hazing policy. If the team had simply held the prom theme party and allowed the members to dress as they chose, this would not be considered hazing.