

William and Mary acts to stop affairs between professors and students

by Philip Walzer
The Virginian-Pilot

A year after a former instructor dissected his relationship with a College of William and Mary student in a national magazine, the school's board has voted to prohibit affairs between professors and undergraduates.

The college's provost, Gillian T. Cell, called it "an important statement of professional ethics. Students are more hurt by these kind of relationships than faculty members are, and I think we have the responsibility to try to protect our students."

William P. Barr, the chairman of the board's Academic Affairs Committee, agreed.

"The new policy clearly reflects my views as to how this should be properly handled," said Barr, a former U.S. attorney general. It reinforces "the impermissibility of relationships between faculty and undergraduates, while giving greater flexibility to graduate students."

The policy, which was passed unanimously last week, bans "consensual amorous relations" between professors and undergraduates. It also applies to graduate students "for whom the faculty member has direct professional responsibility."

The college's deans may "grant exemptions ... in exceptional circumstances." Faculty members who violate the rule could face dismissal.

William and Mary's policy is among the farthest-reaching at Virginia colleges.

Norfolk State and Old Dominion universities discourage, but do not prohibit, sex between professors and students they supervise. Virginia Wesleyan College has no written policy, but it also urges professors to steer clear of such relationships, spokeswoman Betsy Hnath said.

The University of Virginia prohibits relationships between professors and students "over whom they are in a position of authority."

William and Mary's previous policy required professors to tell their bosses if they were involved with a student they were teaching or supervising. College spokesman William T. Walker Jr. said six violations have been reported since it was adopted in 1991.

In the fall of 2000, GQ magazine published an article by former writing instructor Sam Kashner detailing his affair with a married student. The woman's husband later committed suicide, he wrote.

His article also suggested it wasn't unusual for female students at the college to make sexual advances toward male professors. Administrators and students vigorously disputed his portrayal, but the article provoked a review of the policy.

The college's Faculty Assembly drafted the new policy. The group's president, Colleen S. Kennedy, said professors decided it wasn't enough to prohibit relationships between faculty and students in their departments.

"We're small, and our students don't declare their concentrations (majors) until their junior or senior years," said Kennedy, an associate professor of English. "We encourage them to take classes broadly. Freshmen and sophomores don't always know where they're going to concentrate."

William and Mary has about 5,500 undergraduates and 2,000 graduate students.

Kennedy said she didn't think the policy would discourage professors from working closely with students: "We clearly delineate what relationships are prohibited to make professors more comfortable with other kinds of relationships that are important to the college."

Kent Willis, executive director of the ACLU of Virginia, said the issue teetered between protecting adults' rights to "private association" and sparing students from abuse in "power relationships."

Willis said he wasn't sure a ban on relationships between all students and professors at a school could withstand a legal challenge.

The policy, he said, "goes too far. The bottom line is that these are adults and the college is preventing them from engaging in consensual relationships. To ban all such relationships, they cast the net too broadly."

But Joan Murphy, a lawyer in the state Attorney General's Office, told board members last week that the policy is "clearly legally defensible."

At the University Center, undergraduates said student-professor relationships are virtually unheard of. Still, many welcomed the change to avoid the possibility of getting pressured by professors.

"You don't want what a professor feels about you ... to get in the way of your grades," sophomore Helen Mallard said.

University of Michigan delays fall 'rush'

by Marianne George
Knight Ridder Newspapers

Marc Hustvedt is at the front lines of an effort to improve the image of 63 fraternities and sororities at the University of Michigan.

As U-M's first Greek Affairs adviser, Hustvedt lives in Markley Hall - home to more than 1,100 freshmen. He tries to help them avoid the dark side of Greek life, such as binge drinking, as they decide whether to join a group that could also offer them lifetime friendships.

Problems with the Greek system at U-M resurfaced when two freshmen pledges at the Delta Delta Delta sorority told police they were drugged and raped at a Beta Theta Pi fraternity party on Oct. 25.

The fraternity, which was placed on probation in 1998 for alcohol violations, has been suspended and the sorority has placed itself on probation while police, U-M officials and the national organizations investigate. No charges have been filed.

But the alleged incident renews debate about what to do with a system that can be so good, and yet so bad, for students.

In the last 10 years, 10 U-M fraternities have closed because of violations related to alcohol and hazing, and 10 more have closed because of low membership. Four sororities have closed because of low membership, and two have closed as a result of hazing violations in the same period, according to U-M data.

"We need to re-evaluate where our social environment is going," said Hustvedt, president of U-M's Interfraternity Council and a member of Theta Chi fraternity, which will become the fifth alcohol-free chapter on campus in January.

But Hustvedt, 22, of Concord, Mass., knows it's not easy to change a decades-old tradition.

A 1999 study by U-M's Substance Abuse Research Center found that 76 percent of U-M students living in fraternity or sorority houses had engaged in binge drinking within a two-week period, compared to 62 percent of students living in residence halls.

Two solutions have come to the forefront of campus debates: moving freshman rush to the spring, when students aren't as anxious about making friends and fitting in, and moving parties out of fraternity houses and into private party facilities where adults with liquor licenses, insurance and security guards can monitor who is drinking and how much.

Delaying rush from September until at least the end of the freshman year was recently recommended by a task force commissioned by U-M President Lee Bollinger to improve the undergraduate experience.

"The first six weeks at college are very, very stressful," said Marsha Benz, U-M's Alcohol and Other Drug health educator.

"It may be a student's first real taste of independence. There is sexual pressure. They think everyone's having sex, there is a lot of academic stress, and the stress of pledging could be another factor. It's all about wanting to fit in a group," she said.

However, national studies show grade-point averages actually go down if freshmen delay rush participation, according to Richard McKaig, executive director of the Center for the Study of the College Fraternity and vice chancellor for student affairs at Indiana University in Bloomington.

At U-M, freshmen in sororities have a mean grade point average of 3.25, compared to 3.06 for freshman women campus-wide. Freshman fraternity members average a 3.05 mark, compared with the freshman men's campus average of 3.01.

Another problem with delaying rush is that the high demand for housing in Ann Arbor means freshmen usually must sign leases for their sophomore year by the end of the fall semester, according to U-M officials. Deciding whether to go Greek is part of the housing decision-making process.

It could also threaten the stability of fraternities and sororities if they couldn't count on sophomores to fill their large houses. Two-thirds of students living in houses are sophomores, according to U-M statistics.

Casey Bourke, a freshman pledge at Pi Kappa Alpha, said going through fall rush "destroyed the 'Animal House' concept of fraternities for me."

"I never intended to pledge," said Bourke, 18, of Nashville, Tenn. "The interview with the brothers defined the group as socially conscious, a group that reflected all the values I was taught as a child."

Delaying the freshman rush period is to be studied by a steering committee as one of many recommendations made to the un-

dergraduate task force.

Beyond the question of rush events is how to make Greek parties more safe, and less dependent on alcohol.

Mary Beth Seiler, U-M's director of Greek Life, said fraternities and sororities have a self-imposed policy that bans kegs and requires groups to check identification, designate sober monitors and register and limit the size of parties. Sororities and fraternities also offer alcohol education to members.

"What this campus has needed for a long time is to get parties out of the houses to licensed places where they have control of alcohol," she said.

Part of the problem, according to experts and students, is that regulating a large party and enforcing unpopular alcohol policies typically falls to students who are the same age as the revelers.

"It's very difficult at parties. I'm always concerned that everything is running safely," said Evan Chopp, 20, a U-M junior from Dearborn Heights, Mich., who is president of Chi Phi fraternity. He supports moving parties out to private venues.

"We have an older house with big windows and lots of fire escapes. There are lots of places for people to come in, and it's not possible to have someone at every access point," he said. "We're throwing a party, but we're not enjoying ourselves if we're walking around checking everything."

U-M Regent David Brandon agreed: "Leaders often have one year in the job and don't want to be the one to sit their buddies down and say, 'Clean up your act.' Leaders are often sophomores, so you have a 19-year-old elected by their peers in charge of 90 kids. That's not going to work."

Brandon said alcohol and hazing violations at fraternities and sororities obscure the philanthropy that Greek organizations sponsor - last year, they raised more than \$44,000 for charity - and threaten the houses' future.

During the last decade, U-M fraternity and sorority membership has dropped from 4,600 to 4,200, mirroring a national trend, according to McKaig of Indiana University.

The slide has been even greater at Michigan State University, where membership in 36 fraternities and 21 sororities has dropped from 6,000 in 1990 to

3,200 this fall, according to MSU data.

McKaig said students are concerned about the cost of joining, the effect on their grades and negative associations with the Greek life such as alcohol abuse and date rape.

"Sororities party too much," said Rachel Paxson, 18, a U-M freshman from Hartford, Mich., who said she does not plan to join a sorority. "They are more focused on the social aspect of college rather than academics. It's not right to have to pay to meet people. I want to meet them on my own."

McKaig said many colleges nationwide are working to de-emphasize alcohol and return fraternities and sororities to their core values, such as scholarship and leadership. He surveys 700 sororities and fraternities every two years.

Some, like the University of Maryland in College Park, ended fall freshman rush in 1996. Others, like MSU, have taken a greater oversight role. MSU hired a fulltime staff person in 1997 to work with the 43 Greek organizations and set standard policies.

Living at U-M's Markley Hall, Hustvedt tries to help freshmen sort through the issues surrounding Greek life and eliminate the problems that give the organizations a bad name. He has meals with students, attends staff and student meetings and is available to talk to students individually.

So far his work has earned high praise from Bill Zeller, U-M's director of housing, and other staff at Markley. This year there were 35 allegations of alcohol violations at the hall compared with 80 last year between September and Nov. 8, according to U-M data. Part of the credit goes to Hustvedt's efforts, Zeller said.

Mike Camalo, a freshman at Markley, said his conversations with Hustvedt convinced him to wait to pledge even though he had been asked to join Hustvedt's fraternity, Theta Chi.

"I had a three-hour discussion with him in his room, and he told me it was all about my personal comfort and my ability to manage class work and my time," said Camalo, 18, from Ann Arbor, Mich. "I did not feel pressured. Marc helped me understand the issues and the time commitment."

ADMITTING YOU ARE NOT
A FINANCIAL GENIUS
IS NOT A SIGN OF WEAKNESS.

WHERE SMART STUDENTS GO
youcandealwithit.com

Your single source for practical tips on student loans, credit card management, career choices, and even interview skills. Plus everything else you need to make real-life decisions in the real world.

PHEAA
Creating Access to Education