



The Observer

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Hazing: Tradition or Toxicity?

Caleo Makaya, Editor In Chief

Even since I can remember, hazing has been a source of controversy within Greek-letter organizations. Despite the strict bans, and Anti-hazing meetings, the practice still happens in some spaces, sparking ongoing debates about whether it strengthens bonds or causes more harm than good. I have spoken to two members, one who recently crossed and an older member who have shared with me that the “process”, what some might call hazing, builds you up, creates loyalty, and a sense of earned membership, separating those who “went through a burning sand” from those who simply received letters aka “paper” member. Others believe hazing is pure foolishness and contradicts the very principles these organizations were founded on. To gain insight, *The Observer* spoke with these members who have crossed, one younger and the other older, offering a firsthand account of their experience and perspective on the ongoing debate.

Hazing, cont’d on page 3



Photos by L. Parker

In the middle of the day, the Millie M. Charles Building hallway sat quiet and dim, its motion-sensor lights off due to the lack of student traffic.

A Lack of Student Life?

Nakia Fairley, Contributor

How can Southern University at New Orleans become an even better school with more student life?

I’m currently a junior who just transferred from Southeastern University. I came from a school with a lot of student life to coming here with hardly anything. If I’d known how little student life there was at SUNO, I would not have applied. I like to have a balance when it comes to having a college education.

Student Life, cont’d on page 9



Photos by L. Parker

Southern University at New Orleans students participate in the Anti-Hazing Workshop offered every semester prior to students joining or trying to become active members of any organization. The workshop defines hazing, its sufferers, and its consequences.

HOME *of* THE KNIGHTS





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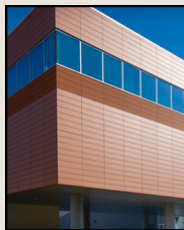
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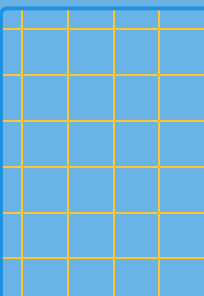




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Hazing

The Southern University system and community are mourning the loss of Caleb Wilson, a 20-year-old junior mechanical engineering student from New Orleans. Wilson, who attended Warren Easton Charter High School, was a gifted trumpet player in the university's famous Human Jukebox Marching Band and was set to become a member of the Beta Sigma Chapter of Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Incorporated. As we mourn this tragedy, one important question remains unanswered: why does this continue to happen in our organizations?

Can you describe your experience joining your sorority?

I believe the experience of joining a sorority really depends on the traditions of that specific chapter. For me, I feel, I entered an organization where my chapter wasn't as established at the time of my interest. My process was different—it wasn't a two-month experience, not even a full month. It happened quickly because we had to ensure compliance in all areas. It was a fast-moving process, but we learned a lot and made it through.

And did you feel pressured to conform to the traditions of your organization?

Yes, absolutely. Growing up, I had this idea of what joining a sorority looked like, but you never really know until you're in it. Some aspects are non-negotiable. For example, and not to say too much, you might be required to kneel—something that might conflict with personal or religious beliefs. But in that moment, it's part of the tradition, and you conform.



A symbol of tradition—while Greek paddles are often adorned with letters, this one stands plain, yet still carries the weight of history, resilience, and remembrance.

What was your understanding of hazing before joining and did your perspective change after crossing?

My perspective on hazing was shaped by movies like *Stomp the Yard*. I thought it meant staying up late, keeping everything secret, deleting social media, avoiding campus, and ultimately "coming out" as a different person. Crossing was supposed to be a transformation, where you reintroduce yourself to the world with a new identity tied to your organization.

To answer the second part, after experiencing it firsthand, I realized that some of what I had imagined was true. There are elements of secrecy and transformation, but I also learned that the process varies depending on the chapter.

Do you believe anti-hazing policies are truly effective today, or does hazing still happen in secret?

I remember receiving paperwork stating that my organization had a strict anti-hazing policy, as do most Greek organizations. My school held a anti-hazing workshop, but the reality is, for generations, people have been conditioned to believe that true membership requires some form of hazing or "process". It's a mindset—a belief that you're only real or "made" if you've been through something difficult.

This way of thinking is deeply ingrained. The idea of "made" versus "paper" members persists because people equate proving yourself with enduring hazing. So yes, hazing still happens in secret, even with policies in place.

How do new members balance respecting tradition while also ensuring a safe and welcoming process for future initiates?

It comes down to maturity and understanding the times we're in. We have to ask: Which traditions serve the organization, and which ones are harmful? If we can redefine what it means to be a member, we can move past the dangerous aspects of the past. That's how we prevent tragedies like the Caleb Wilson case and others where students have been harmed in the process of becoming Greek.

Hazing

Do you think the process still holds meaning and purpose without hazing?

It all comes down to the core values of these organizations—sisterhood, brotherhood, service, and community. The real meaning isn't in how much you endure; it's in the bonds you create and the impact you make. Once we refocus on that, the need for harmful traditions fades away.

Some argue that Greek life today is more about money than tradition. Do you feel that's true?

On a larger scale, yes. National organizations focus on numbers—how many people they can get in. It's about dues, funding, and keeping the organization financially afloat. But on a personal level, the sisterhood or brotherhood is still real. For me, my line sisters and I have a genuine bond that has stood the test of time.

Do you think that bond is because of the process you went through?

Yes, the process builds relationships. But I want to make a distinction: the process itself is learning the history, performing service, and getting to know each other. That's different from hazing. I wouldn't call what I went through hazing. I would call it a process—one that I would feel comfortable passing down to the next generation.

What would you say to someone considering joining but worried about hazing?

Know who you are before you walk into any organization. A Greek organization should not be the place where you try to find yourself. If you don't know who you are beforehand, the process—whatever that may look like—can break you. Be confident in yourself before you take that step.

Do you think Greek life is still important on HBCU campuses today? Would you pledge again?

Without a doubt. Because of my sisters, I would do it ten times over. There have been moments where we have shown up for each other in ways that have been life-saving—mentally, financially, and emotionally. Not everyone has that support system outside of Greek life. Some people don't have close friends or family. This gives them a sense of belonging. Everyone deserves a strong, supportive community.

Given the recent tragedy with Caleb Wilson, do you think sororities and fraternities have a responsibility to speak out against hazing?

Yes. There's no way Caleb Wilson should have lost his life under any circumstances—especially this one. Organizations have to acknowledge the reality: hazing still exists. People still believe it's necessary. And until we address the root of why people feel this way, nothing will change.

Instead of staying silent, we need open conversations. Why do some members believe hazing is a requirement? How did we get here? Once we unpack those beliefs, we can move forward in a way that keeps both tradition and safety intact.

Thank you for your time and honesty. This conversation is important, and I hope this article sheds light on the realities of the process—both the good and the bad.

Thank you. I appreciate you opening up this discussion. Everyone's experience is different, and people need to hear that. It's not just about the negative aspects—we also need to acknowledge the good. Organizations have provided life-changing bonds and opportunities for so many people. I'm glad we're having this conversation.



Photo submission - The Ladies of Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority, Inc. - Gamma Upsilon Chapter 2023



When did you pledge, and what was the pledging process like?

I pledged my fraternity in the fall of 1978. The process was extremely rigorous—physically, emotionally, spiritually, and intellectually. It was an intense and demanding experience.

Given today's laws, would you say you were hazed?

Yes.

Were there anti-hazing laws or workshops back then?

No mandatory workshops, but there were fraternal and possibly university-based restrictions. However, enforcement was lax. Pledging was a public spectacle—walking in lines, dressing identically, and public ridicule were all normalized, things now considered hazing.

I know you are not directly involved but you are still around higher education, what differences do you see between pledging then and now?

Today, the process is more private. Back then, pledges paraded publicly, dressed alike, and made public pronouncements—things now considered hazing. The spectacle was part of campus culture, it brought excitement and a sense of tradition.

Do you think the old ways created a stronger bond compared to today's Greek?

Yes, especially at the undergraduate level. The public nature of pledging allowed the campus and community to witness the sacrifices pledges made, and earned them respect. At HBCUs, even the surrounding communities recognized and respected those who completed the process. It fostered closeness within the fraternity and a national bond—something less visible today.

Do you think hazing is necessary to uphold the values of an organization?

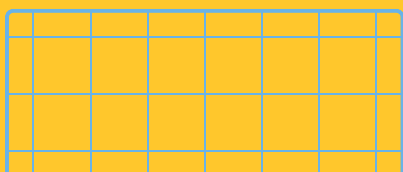
Physical brutality isn't necessary, but a structured "process" and public traditions have value. The loss of the public aspect has a missed opportunity.

Are there aspects of the old process that are still valuable but now considered hazing?

Yes. Walking in line, dressing alike, and publicly affirming the fraternity or sorority created a sense of solidarity and pride. These traditions weren't degrading but helped promote the organization and attract interest on campus.

Are there any aspects of the old ways of going through the process that are still valuable but now considered hazing?

Yes. Walking in line, dressing alike, and publicly greeting your big brother or sister, affirming the fraternity or sorority. Those traditions weren't degrading but helped promote the organization and attract other students.





What is the deeper significance of joining a fraternity or sorority beyond the superficial aspects, like just strolling, making animal noises, no disrespect lol. throwin up hand signs, wearing certain color, sometimes, it just seems like a legal gang?

It's much more than that. It's about lifelong connections, a support network, and opportunities. I've traveled and been welcomed into homes of fraternity brothers I've never met. Career-wise, being in the fraternity has opened doors, helping me advance professionally. The sense of unity reflects African traditions of communal support.

Looking back, do you think everything you went through was necessary and would you do it all again?

I wouldn't trade my experience, and I would do it again. However, some things were unnecessarily dangerous. Times have changed and so have people.

During your time, were there activities that could have resulted in serious harm or fatalities?

Yes. Certain traditions, like crossing unsafe areas or undergoing physically demanding tasks, carried real risks. Some could have lost their lives. Looking back, some of those things were unnecessary.

Should fraternities be more publicly accountable when hazing incidents result in tragedy, I just feel like when things happen like what happened to Caleb, the Ques should come out and say, hey, enough is enough. I understand there are few individuals that behave that way but there is a silence just like when some police do egregious things but the other don't speak up or stop it?

Accountability exists, but often through personal and one on one action rather than public statements. Organizations provide support to affected families, but legal restrictions may prevent them from making public pronouncements.

One last question, do you think hazing was part of the original traditions, or did it evolve over time? I just can't see or believe that black men and women behaved in such a way in the early 1900s and if so when did it change?

I don't think early fraternity members practiced pledging as it became in later years. It likely evolved in the 1930s or 1940s and became more physically demanding by the 1960s. Many members at the time had military backgrounds, which influenced the culture. The goal was to prepare young men for a tough world, but today, liability and legal consequences have changed what is acceptable.

Thank you for your time.

Interviewee: You are very welcome.



Caleo Makaya going over her questions.

Photo by L. Parker





AI and the Ruin of Thinking

Story by Teelah McCoy

I was listening to music on Spotify the other day, and an intriguing advertisement caught my attention, “*AI GENERATERATED PLAYLIST: MADE JUST FOR YOU!*”

I did not completely understand why a company that profits from the creativity of musical talents would even consider using AI. Nevertheless, I was curious to see what this playlist had to offer. When I took a peek at the “AI playlist,” I was astonished that every song offered was from mainstream pop artists who have no relation to my musical taste. I began to wonder what the hype around AI was if it could not even supply a simple playlist. Why are people determined to integrate this technology into every aspect of their everyday lives? The answer is quite simple: People are lazy. We live in a century where people refuse to commit serious amount of time and effort into the work they do. And companies, being money-driven capitalists, will always find a way to take advantage of people. These companies create systems that advertises AI as “helping” build creativity when in reality the machines are doing all of the work. These AI platforms are catering to individuals who desire originality but lack the discipline necessary to improve in a craft. College is the ideal place to discover and improve skills, but the frequent use of Artificial Intelligence in classrooms will diminish our ability to be true innovators. As someone pursuing a career in education, I fear for the next generation of students who are being raised without the drive to create and discover without the “help” of AI.

In our generation, we have the world at our fingertips. Social media dangerously influences our lives. Even now, major historical events such as the 2024 presidential election are being broadcasted on social media networks such as “X” and “TikTok” for the world to witness and influences how we think and even vote. With social media influencing how the public perceives, it is crucial for us to think on our own. Especially with companies and individuals using social media platforms to spread false information. AI would take away that ability to critically think. Content such as deep fakes and AI generated voice changers are already infiltrating social and musical spaces. It is dangerous to simply post a selfie on Instagram in fear of someone using AI to add your face onto another person’s body for their own pleasure. History has proved that humans are limited only by imagination. AI will make it easier for misinformation to spread like wildfire without having anyone to check for accuracy. When we are not able to think for ourselves, technology will do it for us. This level of control threatens to turn our rights and imagination over to companies.

We at SUNO are learning how to navigate through life on our own. It is our responsibility to master the tools required to improve society and make a change using our own skills. It is difficult to gain those skills when using AI for the simplest tasks. I was in class when a classmate sent around a note “recommending” students to use ChatGPT for an essay assignment. She wrote, “Trust me. It writes the entire thing for you!” The class laughed it off, but I was not amused. College is meant to be a place to learn and exceed expectations, and how exactly will using ChatGPT help improve my writing or thinking? Unfortunately, it has become the “norm” to take the easy way out, yet taking the easy way out only decreases your ability to think. There is a sense of pride when one discovers they are improving in a craft, and AI technology removes that euphoric feeling completely. Are you really going to feel accomplished getting an A on an AI generated paper that you pretended to write?

Teaching is my chosen career choice because of my personal passion for instilling the value of reading and writing to young children. The new amplifications of AI are worrisome because of the way students are retaining information. Students learn through interactions and from their own personal experiences. Using technology to create teaching content is not taking into consideration every child’s needs. This new era of Artificial Intelligence is allowing students to learn how to not put effort into their work. Giving our imagination and creative skills over to AI will make us ordinary people. Mediocrity is something that should be feared, not accepted. We lived through an entire pandemic where young children were forced to learn at home. Remote learning has already negatively impacted the way students memorize because of the lack of human support and no emphasis on communication. We are social beings. Humans are supposed to form connections with each other through our interactions. AI being used in the classroom does not allow humans to speak to each other and learn from one another.

There are various movies that are meant to warn humanity about the abuse of technology. The famous “Matrix” franchise or even Disney’s “WALL-E” depict the consequences of a world ruled by machines. Our education is a central part of building a functional society, and the rise of AI is causing a valid fear amongst incoming teachers. What would be the point of teaching when a machine can do it for you? Cyber-intelligence is creating an environment where people are relying on tech to do everything for them. We are in a balancing act between technology and human individuality; AI is placing humanity on the inferior side. As a future educator in a time where literacy is on the verge of collapse, the last thing our society needs is a robot thinking for us, and we are lining up to give over our humanity.



ARE YOU READY FOR THIS?

Nickolus Harrison, Contributor

A recent Gallup study found that 96% of academic leaders reported that their institutions effectively prepared students for the world of work. However, barely one in ten business leaders agreed. Graduates often lack the understanding and the skills they need to succeed in the workplace or get a job. All too often, students are led to believe that obtaining a degree will prepare them to work in a field effectively. After spending the money and time it takes to obtain a degree, many college graduates cannot maintain employment in their chosen field. The simple reality is that a degree does not equate to competency or field-specific knowledge.

Many have written about the reality that universities have been severely constrained by budget cuts, which contributes to the result of graduates entering their chosen field without the proper knowledge or comprehension needed to pass a state licensing exam or to work effectively. This is a heartbreaking reality that graduates face.

Some initiative-taking students have had to take free online courses to learn the subject their professor failed to teach. Other students understand the realities of curriculum lag, so they do extra research and job-specific training to learn current practices. However, most students are misguided by the notion that the university is ensuring that they are fully equipped. These misguided students enter the workforce utterly unprepared for the competitive market. The piece of paper obtained at the end of all these courses will not be an acceptable alibi for the lack of competency needed to work in the field.

There are steps students can take to capitalize on their educational experience. Students can examine their education perspective. They can ask themselves: Why am I here? Is your motivation employment-centered or competence-centered? If employability is the capacity to obtain and retain a satisfying job, then yes, simply getting a degree will give you access to better jobs, but it will not ensure job security. Meanwhile, a competence-centered perspective focuses on the skills and competencies the graduates develop during their studies. It is up to the individual student to make sure that they apply themselves in a way that leads to competencies. Otherwise, they enter the workforce with employment deficiencies.

As a senior, I can tell you that I have had to be intentional about my education. This meant reading my textbooks, quizzing myself, and using online platforms to ensure that I understood the content of the course. I have taken non-school-related courses to learn current methodologies used in my field. My drive has resulted in a 4.0. However, more importantly, it has equipped me in a manner that provoked the staff at all three of my internship sites to respect my clinical opinion and observation, i.e., competency. Furthermore, I have been active in my studies. I have participated in study groups, tutoring, online resources, and campus activities. I always do extra because my journey is about being equipped to excel at what I do. It is not simply enough to be given access to the room; to be effective and stay in it, I must be skilled enough to work it. I must be able to talk, walk, and conduct myself like a professional, which requires much more than a degree.

I challenge every student to start actively reading their textbooks and studying not to make grades but to be prepared to be competitive in the workforce. Excelling in your profession, not just getting a foot in the door, requires it. Seniors across the nation are looking at job prospects and state licensing boards. Unfortunately, some ask themselves, "Am I ready for this?" for the first time. For me and the rest of the class of 2025, we are about to be weighed and measured. Each of us will reap the results of our efforts.





Student Life

(from page 1)



With my first semester ending, there's a few things I've noticed. Living on campus is very helpful as far as being able to take me across campus, but there are things I definitely don't like about housing. There is always trash in the grass and in the parking lot, and I saw a rat run across the wall. Maintenance takes a while to fix any problem when you put orders in. I put two orders in to have my dryer fixed, and no one has come yet to fix it. I went to housing to try and fix the problem. They took my name down, but nothing else happened after that. I was just told to put in another order. I would also like to see the empty grass area in the middle of housing be used for more activities and events that housing put together, like movie nights, etc.

Coming in as a transfer, during orientation I was told to get involved with the school and not stay in my room all day. I found it kind of challenging to find activities to join. There are not many clubs or organizations offered that would make people want to join. Another thing is that there was not much advertisement for any of the clubs that are listed on the school website.

When I think of an HBCU I think of a lot of black students enrolled on campus. Well, that's not the case for SUNO. It's like a ghost town every time I step on campus. An anonymous source told me that "since COVID, people either transferred out or went online." I was told that SUNO actually used to be fun and have a lot of student activities and life. Hopefully as we go into spring semester, there will be more activities on campus.

As a big sports girl, I enjoy watching any type of sport. I wish that there were more sports offered here like softball, swim, track and field or soccer. I did hear that they are slowly bringing back two different sports, which I like. It's a work in progress.

Overall, this school has its pros and cons, but the main reason we're all here is to learn and get a degree. Don't get me wrong, SUNO is a good school, but it does need some TLC. I'm excited to see what becomes of SUNO in the future. GO KNIGHTS!!!

THIS SERIES OF PHOTOGRAPHS WAS TAKEN ON WEDNESDAY, MARCH 19TH, BETWEEN THE HOURS OF 10:30 A.M. AND 11:00 A.M.

PHOTOS BY L. PARKER





A Knight's Prayer

I have never written a prayer. I have only prayed out loud or in silenced. However, I have read many prayers—in the Bible and in other sacred writings or books. So, today, I would like to offer up a written prayer.

Did not Apostle Paul offer up prayers, even as he wrote his letters to the early churches? Did not St. Augustine pour out his heart in prayer through his Book of Confessions? Did not David cry, "Hear my prayer, O Lord"? Also, did not Abraham intercede in prayer for the city of Sodom in the book of Genesis? Most of all, did not Christ teach us to pray, as recorded by the apostles in the Gospels?

So, again, today, I, too, desire to lift my voice in prayer and to join the saints in a written prayer unto You, Lord—for Southern University at New Orleans.

Dear Lord, HBCUs were birthed in struggle. From their very inception, these institutions stood in the face of injustice—fighting for human rights, simply for those recently enslaved persons to be educated. HBCUs stood for civil rights—simply for the rights of all people to pursue self-development and to gain equal access to knowledge and information.

SUNO in specific has endured storms—both literal and figurative. In 2005, Hurricane Katrina came, and the buildings were gone, the classrooms reduced to trailers. But still, You kept us. Still, we pressed on. Still, we were resilient.

In my time as an undergraduate—student leader—I witnessed times of uncertainty. SUNO was placed on probation by its accreditation board, SACSCOC and simultaneously, the COVID-19 pandemic came and added to the anxiety. Yet even then, Lord, we overcome. And now—even now—we face another storm.

We are facing efforts from the President of the United States and the Governor of Louisiana to dismantle the Department of Education—a department born out of necessity. For if the states had fulfilled their duties from the beginning, there would have been no need for such federal oversight. But because they failed, I believe, Lord, you ordained provision.

So today, I pray Southern University at New Orleans not only endure but flourish. Let it not only survive but thrive. Let every HBCU and every institution of higher learning, dedicated to equity and justice—persevere.

Let SUNO's resilience shine as bright. Let it continue to be a beacon of hope, a door for those who come knocking, an answer for those who have questions, and an iron for iron and so I pray for every soul who reads this—that we may touch and agree in spirit and in faith. In Jesus' mighty name—Amen.

Written by,
Observer Graduate Student



Time to Heal

Caleo Makaya, Editor-In- Chief

SUNO — As the spring semester comes to a close, students, alumni, and members of the SUNO community may be wondering what's happening to the anticipated Greek presentation that was promoted at the start of the semester. The flyers have been taken down off social media and around the campus, prompting quiet conversations across amongst the community. After speaking with student leaders and members of the administration, the Observer learned that the decision to forego the Greek new member's presentation was made with sensitivity, and unity.

In light of a recent and serious incident in Baton Rouge, SUNO's Greek community chose to step back from hosting a public presentation this spring; the ripple effects have been deeply felt across the broader Southern University System. “The campus ultimately came together to choose empathy over excitement, and reflection over routine. We felt it was important to pause—out of respect, reflection, and solidarity. At some point in the future, we will recognize the new members, but for now, the SUNO Greek community understands this is a time to heal,” said the SGA President.



All Photos by Elbred Malone III





About Contributors

Teelah McCoy

Teelah McCoy is an education major at SUNO whose goal is to help others conquer their challenges and succeed in the world around us.

Nickolus Harrison

Nickolus Harrison RPSS, CIT, is a proud senior SUNO Knight majoring in Addictive Behavior Counseling and Prevention with a minor in Criminal Justice. Nick is a 24-year resident of New Orleans, hailing from rural George County, Mississippi.

Nakia Fairley

Nakia Fairley is from Slidell, Louisiana and is majoring in Child Development/Family Studies.

Caleo Makaya

Caleo Makaya is a Pre-Nursing student from Kenya, Africa. She serves as the captain of the SUNO Cheer Team and is the Editor-in-Chief of the Yearbook Club.

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