

# Doctor Gentry's Blog

Doctor Gentry's Blog covers a variety of topics related to student affairs and the fraternity/sorority industry, including hazing prevention, brother/sisterhood, Title IX, student development and more. Follow Dr. Gentry McCreary on twitter @doctorgentry

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## Confronting Hazing Myths - "Hazing Builds Loyalty to the Organization"

It was Thomas Paine who famously coined the phrase "That which we obtain too cheap, we esteem to lightly." This saying has almost become proverb in our society - in order to really appreciate something, it is thought that one must go through great hardship in obtaining it. The college degree is valued more by the one who works hard and overcomes adversity in order to obtain it as opposed to the one who breezes through with no difficulty. The relationship most valued is that one you had to work the hardest to obtain, not the guy or gal you met right before the bar closed last night. As a society, we place great value in working hard to achieve goals, and it is commonly assumed that we appreciate those hard-earned accomplishments more than the things which come our way with minimal effort.

This idea is a driving force behind much of the hazing that takes place in college fraternities and sororities. [Aldo Cimino \(2011\)](#) identified the building of commitment and loyalty as one of the sociological factors that contribute to hazing within groups, and nowhere is this idea more evident than within fraternities and sororities. In their national study of student hazing, [Allan and Madden \(2008\)](#) found that "feeling a sense of accomplishment" was the second most common perceived positive outcome associated with hazing by college students. It stands to reason that this feeling of accomplishment - the idea that you worked hard to earn your membership - would contribute to levels of organizational loyalty and commitment.

In our research on brotherhood, hazing and unethical behavior, my colleague Josh Schutts and I set out to better understand the relationship between hazing and organizational commitment. First, we adapted the [work of my friend Chad Ellsworth \(2006\)](#), who studied how students define hazing. Using his research, we developed a "Hazing Tolerance Scale" that measures the level of hazing that a student would find acceptable within their organization. For a full description of the development of the Hazing Tolerance Scale, see [McCreary\(2012\)](#).

Next, we scoured the literature for measures of organizational commitment. As it turns out, we were able to find three different measures of organizational commitment. Meyer and Allen (1991) developed a three component [model of organizational commitment](#). The first component, Affective Commitment, relates to the emotional connection to the organization (i.e. "I really love my fraternity/sorority"). The second, Continuance Commitment, refers to the desire to remain a member of the organization (i.e. "I would never leave my organization, because there are no better options for me. The cost of leaving is greater than the cost of staying"). The final component, Normative Commitment, refers to the sense of obligation felt towards the organization (i.e. "I am committed to my fraternity/sorority because it has given so much to me"). These three constructs have been widely studied in the field of industrial/organizational psychology, but to our knowledge have never been studied within the context of fraternities and sororities.

When we analyzed the data from the study, which included nearly 700 respondents from 18 college campuses across the United States, we fully expected there to be a relationship between hazing and at least one of the three components of organizational commitment. To our amazement, the relationships were completely flat.

Simply put, there is no relationship at all between the level or severity of hazing tolerated within a fraternity and the levels of commitment that members have to that fraternity. This finding flies in the face of the oft-cited notion that a difficult new member program, rife with hazing, leads to members that are more loyal and more committed to the organization. Instead, what our research finds is that those organizations that foster a sense of belonging and accountability have the most loyal and committed members.

Those of us who work with fraternities and sororities should use this information to our advantage. We often have conversations with students about hazing in the spirit of preventing its occurrence. As I have stated in a [previous blog](#), I think one of the most important things we can do to prevent hazing is to directly challenge the mechanisms by which students rationalize and justify hazing. When we confront students with these brutal facts, we can create cognitive dissonance regarding the benefits of hazing and open the door for conversations about its prevention. But until we convince students that hazing does not accomplish all of the good things they like to associate with it, then we cannot have meaningful prevention conversations. Our ability to prevent hazing is directly linked with our ability to confront the myths that lead to its continued perpetration.

Posted by Unknown at 8:35 AM

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1.



[Jesse Saldamando](#) February 15, 2016 at 2:16 PM

I would like to say that your findings are refreshing to see. I understand that hazing has become a cultural issue and like to see information helping to better the issue.

[Reply](#)

### About Me



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Consultant, speaker, researcher and author Dr. Gentry McCreary is the CEO and managing partner of Dyad Strategies, LLC, an assessment and applied research firm specializing in working with fraternity and sorority communities. Gentry is also an affiliated consultant with the NCHERM Group LLC, a higher education risk management firm, where we works with college campuses on hazing prevention, investigation and adjudication. Gentry worked for over 10 years in higher education, most recently serving as the Associate Dean of Students/Deputy Title IX Coordinator at the University of West Florida. Previously, he served as the Director of Greek Affairs at the University of Alabama, during a time in which that fraternity/sorority community became the largest in the United States. He speaks and writes on topics related to higher education, hazing, fraternities and sororities and student development. In his spare time, he is an avid outdoorsman who enjoys golf, canoeing, backpacking and upland bird hunting with his German Shorthaired Pointer, Ellie.