

## **Virginia Public Higher Education Hazing Model Policy**

**Updated: August 18, 2025**

Code of Virginia § 18.2-56 states, in its entirety:

*It shall be unlawful to haze so as to cause bodily injury, any student at any school or institution of higher education.*

*Any person found guilty thereof shall be guilty of a Class 1 misdemeanor.*

*Any person receiving bodily injury by hazing shall have a right to sue, civilly, the person or persons guilty thereof, whether adults or infants.*

*The president or other presiding official of any school or institution of higher education receiving appropriations from the state treasury shall, upon satisfactory proof of the guilt of any student hazing another student, sanction and discipline such student in accordance with the institution's policies and procedures. The institution's policies and procedures shall provide for expulsions or other appropriate discipline based on the facts and circumstances of each case and shall be consistent with the model policies established by the Department of Education or the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia, as applicable. The president or other presiding official of any school or institution of higher education receiving appropriations from the state treasury shall report hazing which causes bodily injury to the attorney for the Commonwealth of the county or city in which such school or institution of higher education is, who shall take such action as he deems appropriate.*

*For the purposes of this section, "hazing" means to recklessly or intentionally endanger the health or safety of a student or students or to inflict bodily injury on a student or students in connection with or for the purpose of initiation, admission into or affiliation with or as a condition for continued membership in a club, organization, association, fraternity, sorority, or student body regardless of whether the student or students so endangered or injured participated voluntarily in the relevant activity.*

The Virginia Public Higher Education Hazing Model Policy fulfills the responsibility of the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV) to establish a "model policy" with which institutional policies and procedures "shall be consistent." In keeping with the purpose of a model policy, this document provides (i) a template to guide substantive provisions of institutional policies, and (ii) a set of governance and operating recommendations. The template and recommendations offered here are meant to promote good practices in the domain of hazing policy, and to provide general guidance as to components that should or could be included in institutional policies. It is the responsibility of each institution of public higher education to establish its specific policies in accord with its own governance arrangements and in keeping with the full scope of legal obligations—both state and federal—to which it is subject. Further, the template and recommendations offered here should not be interpreted as limiting the scope of policies that

institutions may adopt. Institutions may include components, and adopt procedures, not delineated in this document if doing so contributes to fulfilling relevant legal responsibilities and promoting good practices.

## ***I. Template***

The template offered below (A-G) describes main components of the institutional hazing policy in keeping with known requirements of state and federal law and acknowledged best practices. The description of any specific component or set of components should not be taken to completely determine the scope of institutional policies on that topic. Each institution retains the authority to establish its policy in accord with its particular circumstances, governance arrangements, and collective best judgment.

**A. Statement of the Reason(s) for the Hazing Policy.** The institutional policy should state the reason(s) for its hazing policy. It is recommended that the stated reason include reference to Code of Virginia § 18.2-56. It may also refer to other state and federal legal requirements, as well as institution-specific ideals and values.

Sample language institutions might use includes the following:

“The purpose of this policy is to ensure that students at the University/College of (hereinafter Institution) are not subjected to any type of hazing. It is the responsibility of all individuals associated with the Institution to encourage an atmosphere of learning, social responsibility, and respect for human dignity.

Hazing is an unproductive and hazardous activity that is incongruous with this responsibility and has no place at this Institution, either on or off campus. It is the opinion of this academic community that this kind of behavior is injurious to the individuals involved and the Institution itself.

This policy applies to all persons and groups associated with the Institution, including, but not limited to, administrators, coaches, faculty, organization advisors, staff, students, athletic teams, bands, fraternities, organizations, and sororities. The Institution shall designate a formal and consistent process for receiving hazing complaints, require investigations into such reports, and ensure compliance with this policy.”

**B. Definitions.** The institutional policy should include a set of definitions of important terms, especially (but not limited to) terms that will be used in campus disciplinary proceedings, to ensure a sufficiently clear guide to student behavior.

It is recommended that “Hazing” be a defined term and that the definition be derived from, and consistent with, Code of Virginia § 18.2-56 and federal law under the Stop Campus Hazing Act (<https://www.congress.gov/bill/118th-congress/senate-bill/2901/text>)

Federal law states that hazing:

*means any intentional, knowing, or reckless act committed by a person (whether individually or in concert with other persons) against another person or persons regardless of the willingness of such other person or persons to participate, that-*

*(I) is committed in the course of an initiation into, an affiliation with, or the maintenance of membership in, a student organization; and*

*(II) causes or creates a risk, above the reasonable risk encountered in the course of participation in the institution of higher education or the organization (such as the physical preparation necessary for participation in an athletic team), of physical or psychological injury....*

It is recommended that defined terms include some or all of the following and that the definitions offered be consistent with existing state and federal law:

- **“Administrator”**  
Sample definitions might include the following: a president, vice-president, dean, head of a school, director of a program or campus office, or designee of one of the aforementioned individuals.
- **“Organization”**  
Sample definitions might include the following: an association, athletic team, band, club, cooperative, corps, fraternity, order, society, sorority, or other similar group, whose members primarily are students of the Institution. The federal definition of organization is: “an organization at an institution of higher education (such as a club, society, association, varsity or junior varsity athletic team, club sports team, fraternity, sorority, band, or student government) in which two or more of the members are students enrolled at the institution of higher education, whether or not the organization is established or recognized by the institution.”
- **“Staff”**  
Sample definitions might include the following: any person employed directly by or retained through a contract with the Institution, including a coach or supervisor of an organization, professor, or intern.
- **“Student”**  
Sample definitions might include the following: any person who is enrolled in or matriculating at the Institution, registered or in attendance in a program operated by the Institution, or who has been accepted for admission into any program operated by the Institution.

**C. Statement of Prohibited Activities.** The institutional policy should include a list of prohibited activities, i.e., of activities that are considered by the institution to constitute “hazing.” A statement should be included to the effect that the list is intended to illustrate many forms of prohibited activities and to clarify core concepts that explain how they fall under the label “hazing.” A sample list of prohibited activities is offered below. This list should not be interpreted as exhaustive, or

otherwise limiting on institutional policies—each institution should characterize prohibited activities in accord with its particular circumstances and governance arrangements:

**Sample List of Prohibited Activities**

- Paddling;
- Kidnapping;
- All forms of physical activity which are used to harass, punish, or harm an individual, including pushups, calisthenics, running, or similar exercises
- Forced excursions or road trips;
- Confinement;
- Spraying, painting, or pelting with any substance;
- Burying in any substance;
- Nudity with the intent to cause embarrassment;
- Acting as a personal servant
- Sensory deprivation or exposure to uncomfortable elements, including putting irritating substances on body parts;
- Verbal abuse;
- Wearing of apparel that is conspicuous and/or indecent;
- Coerced consumption of alcohol or any other substance, legal or illegal;
- Being forced or coerced to engage in any kind of sexual activity; including forced nudity.
- Depriving students of sufficient sleep (six consecutive hours per day is normally considered to be a minimum);
- Coerced burning, branding, or tattooing any part of the body;
- Psychological hazing, defined as any act which is likely to:
  - Compromise an individual's dignity;
  - Cause an individual embarrassment or shame;
  - Cause an individual to be the object of malicious amusement or ridicule; or
  - Cause an individual emotional distress;
- Interrogating an individual in an intimidating or threatening manner;
- Misleading prospective members in an effort to convince them that they will not become members unless they engage in hazing activities;
- Misleading prospective members into believing that they will be hurt during induction or initiation;
- Carrying any items (shields, paddles, bricks, hammers, etc.) that serve no constructive purpose or that are designed to punish or embarrass the carrier;
- Blindfolding and parading individuals in public areas for amusement or embarrassment, blindfolding and transporting in a motor vehicle, or privately conducting blindfolding activities, that serve no constructive purpose;
- Binding or restricting an individual in any way that would prohibit them from moving on their own;
- Requiring or suggesting that an individual obtain or possess items or complete tasks in an unlawful manner (e.g., stealing signs for a scavenger hunt); and

- Prohibiting an individual from social contact or from associating with other individuals or groups.
- Hazing also includes soliciting, directing, aiding, or otherwise participating actively or passively in the above acts.

**D. Statement of Location Specificity.** The institutional policy should include a statement to the effect that it encompasses all acts of hazing whether on or off campus. As such, an act of hazing by an individual or organization will be viewed by the Institution as a violation of the Institution's hazing policy, regardless of where the act of hazing took place.

**E. Statement of the Role of Consent.** The institutional policy should include a statement to the effect that an individual may not "consent" to being hazed such that their voluntary subjection to otherwise prohibited activities would constitute a legitimate defense by any other individual or organization for violating the institution's hazing policy.

**F. Statement of the Institution's Disciplinary Procedures Related to Hazing.** The institutional policy should include a description, or make reference to a separately maintained publicly available description, of the institution's disciplinary procedures related to hazing. Specific components to be addressed should include but need not be limited to:

- Reporting—how suspected violations of the institution's hazing policy can be reported to the institution, including means of communication and whether anonymous reports will be accepted.
- Investigation—how reports of violations will be investigated, including the officers and/or bodies that will conduct investigations and on what timeframes.
- Disciplinary adjudication—how investigated incidents will be adjudicated by designated officers and/or bodies, including (but not limited to):
  - rights of the accused to defend themselves and/or engage an advocate to assist in their defense;
  - range of penalties for different kinds of infractions; and
  - whether disciplinary decisions are subject to appeal, and the process for making an appeal.
- Individual and Organization Responsibility—the extent to which both individuals and organizations are subject to institutional disciplinary procedures, and differential procedures that apply to individuals vs. organizations.
- Immunity from disciplinary action--Institutions should include a provision for disciplinary immunity from disciplinary action based on hazing or personal consumption of drugs or alcohol where such disclosure is made by a bystander not involved in such acts in conjunction with a good faith report of an act of hazing in advance of or during an incident of hazing that causes injury or is likely to cause injury to a person.
- Retaliation—the extent to which reporters and victims of hazing violations and those cooperating in any investigation or disciplinary proceeding shall be free from retaliation

by individuals and organizations, and whether proven instances of retaliation carry additional penalties.

- **Disclosure**—At least 10 calendar days before the start of fall and spring academic semesters, the institution publicly reports actual findings of violations of the institution's code of conduct or of federal or state laws pertaining to hazing that are reported to campus authorities or local law enforcement. [provide hyperlink to report]. The reports are available on the institution's homepage and Greek Life homepage, or its equivalent in a prominent location, and a hardcopy notice of the nature and availability of the reports, including the website address where they can be found, is provided to all attendees at student orientations,

**G. Education.** Under federal law, institutions must have “a statement of policy regarding hazing prevention and awareness programs (as defined by the institution) that includes a description of research-informed campus-wide prevention programs designed to reach students, staff, and faculty, which includes...primary prevention strategies intended to stop hazing before hazing occurs.”

In compliance with Virginia's Adam's Law, “each current member, new member, and potential new member of each student organization with a new member process must attend hazing prevention training that includes extensive, current, and in-person education about hazing, the dangers of hazing, including alcohol intoxication, and hazing laws and institution policies and information explaining that the institution's disciplinary process is not to be considered a substitute for the criminal legal process. If a student organization with new members has an advisor, such advisor shall attend such hazing prevention training.”

## **II. Recommendations**

### **Notification and Public Availability of Policy**

The institution should provide notice of its hazing policy to administrators, coaches, faculty, organization advisors, staff, students, and all organizations at the beginning of each academic year, and ensure that the policy is publicly available in appropriate communication venues.

### **Governance**

The institution's hazing policy should be approved, and subject to routine maintenance, via institutional processes that apply to student life policies in general. It is a good practice for the hazing policy to be approved by the institution's governing board.

### **Raising Awareness**

Institutions should have a regular program of awareness raising efforts to inform the campus community about the prohibition on hazing and to encourage dispositions and behaviors that lessen the likelihood that hazing will occur. Institutions are encouraged to leverage professional, research informed expertise in their student activities and Greek life offices to advise student organizations on productive new

member activities. The institutional policy may suggest or require that student organizations consult with institutional advisors around their planned new member processes prior to conducting these processes. A senior official of the university, at the vice president level or above, should have overall responsibility for awareness raising, to lend respect to the efforts and impress on the community that the issue of hazing is taken seriously by the institution.

- Include a hazing program as part of first-year student orientation
- Provide bystander intervention skill building programs.
- Provide training for student leaders on ethical leadership.
- Promote strategies for building group cohesion without hazing.
- Educate administrators, faculty, staff, and students on the potential warning signs one may see from an individual who is being hazed, i.e. academic hardship, lack of sleep, etc.
- Certify an understanding of the Institution's policy by all students in the form of a pledge
- Review and provide guidance to student organizations on their planned initiation and new member programs and activities.
- Encourage frequent communication among administrators, staff, and students regarding the Institution's policies and expectations as they relate to hazing
- Create an Anti-Hazing Coalition to facilitate discussion surrounding proactive
- and preventative measures against hazing
- Design training programs on preventing, recognizing, and responding to hazing for campus administrators, staff, and students as the individuals may benefit from those trainings.

Suggested individuals to receive such training include, but are not limited to:

- Deans
- Campus Life Directors
- Campus Counselors
- Healthcare Professionals
- Resident Assistants
- Orientation Leaders
- Implement Hazing Prevention Week on campus
- Create online educational programs
- Reach out to parents and community members
- Communicate with both local and on-campus law enforcement to better understand and definitively recognize hazing on campus