'Dangerous, irresponsible':
UL officials, students react to possible hazing death of LSU freshman pledge

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As investigations into the possible hazing death of 18-year-old Louisiana State University fraternity pledge Maxwell Gruver continue, some University of Louisiana at Lafayette administrators are doubling down on the university's own hazing protocol.

Gruver, one of the newest members of LSU's Phi Delta Theta Fraternity chapter, was transported either Wednesday evening or Thursday morning from LSU's fraternity row to a local medical center, where he later died. Initial autopsy reports showed swelling in Gruver's lungs and brain, as well as elevated amounts of alcohol and THC in his body. Louisiana State University announced Thursday it is investigating Gruver's death as a potential hazing incident.

"It's very heartbreaking to see something like that happen in our community regardless of what letters you wear on your chest," a UL Lafayette Greek community member who wished to remain anonymous said.

The Phi Delta Theta headquarters announced Monday its LSU chapter has been shut down. The fraternity also encouraged Baton Rouge officials to prosecute those involved in the incident to the fullest extent of the law.

Calling hazing "dangerous, irresponsible and unacceptable" in a press conference Thursday, Sept. 4, LSU President F. King Alexander announced that all fraternity and sorority events at LSU have been suspended indefinitely, placing a hold on activities ranging from mixers to charity drives and fundraisers.

The UL Lafayette Greek student said they believe LSU reacted accordingly.

"I'd expect if something similar happened on our campus and in our Greek community, I would expect UL to react appropriately," the student said.

Margarita Perez, UL Lafayette dean of students, said she and other administrators are debriefing sorority and fraternity presidents on the incident at LSU and reminding the leaders of the hazing policies that exist on campus, as well as reaching out to colleagues in Baton Rouge to offer support.

"Hazing isn't necessary, it's not going to be tolerated and there's really just no place for it on our campus," Perez said.

Erica Schwartz, assistant dean of students for Greek affairs at UL Lafayette, was not available for comment at press time after multiple phone calls to her office.

Gabriella Catalanotto, a UL Lafayette sophomore marketing major, said she does not believe penalizing both sororities and fraternities was fair, as sororities were not found to be involved in the incident.

"You hear more about hazing with the guys and not so much the girls," she said.

Although not part of the Greek community at UL Lafayette, Catalanotto said she hears of hazing incidents at UL Lafayette.

"You definitely don't hear about as many incidents over here," she said. "I just hear how with the (UL Lafayette) frats that they make the guys drink so much, but that's about it."

Home to 45 Panhellenic, Interfraternity Council and Pan-Hellenic organizations combined, LSU was home to 5,398 fraternity and sorority members during the 2015-2016 academic year, according to an annual report on Greek life issued by the university. Greek students make up 22.39 percent of the LSU undergraduate student body.

Comparatively, Greeks at UL Lafayette make up around 10-12 percent of the student body.

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of the undergraduate student body, with 25 fraternities and sororities under NPC, NPHC and IFC.

Both LSU and UL Lafayette list anti-hazing policies on their websites. Louisiana State University's policy states that those who participate in, encourage, fail to report or carelessly allow hazing to occur may be guilty of hazing. State law mandates that those found guilty may be fined anywhere from $10 to $100 and/or imprisoned for 10-30 days, as well as be expelled from the university.

Taylor, an LSU student and member of the Greek community who asked The Vermilion to withhold her last name, said Greek men and women have removed their organizations’ names from their social media descriptions, left their lettered clothes in their dorm rooms and homes and awaited more detailed stipulations of their suspension.

WBRZ reported Monday that LSU Greek organizations are prohibited from holding events such as council meetings, philanthropy events, intramural or fitness events. Taylor said she and her sisters are unsure how long the restrictions will be set in place.

“As a sorority member, I understand what they’re doing,” she said. “It’s just frustrating since sororities on LSU’s campus have not had problems with hazing.”

Taylor said one or two fraternities each year she has attended LSU have been caught for hazing and kicked off campus.

“I think we all knew that all of these things were going to happen and they were expected,” she said.

Catalanotto said fraternities need to “stop bullying pledges” and reassess their active members’ treatment of junior members.

Perez said organizations, Greek or non-Greek, must seek other ways to build autonomy that are constructive rather than destructive.

“I need students to understand that we all are to be valued, and we all should be accepted,” she said. “If we are really respecting one another and we are a community that respects one another, then we are a community without hazing.”