

Hazing Prevention

Policy

Hazing is not permitted at Caltech. Hazing is not only illegal, but it violates the Code of Conduct and the Honor Code, in that it takes unfair advantage of members of our community.

Definition of Hazing at Caltech:

Caltech's definition of hazing is broader than the definition under California's Penal Code section 245.6, the full text of which can be found below. Conduct that is illegal under California law is also prohibited under this policy; however, Caltech's policy also covers actions that might be lawful but nevertheless cause non-physical injury and are otherwise contrary to Caltech's standards and norms.

Prohibited hazing at Caltech includes any activity carried out in connection with a student organization or group, regardless of whether the organization or group is officially recognized by Caltech, that reasonably places another person in danger of physical or psychological harm, or demonstrates disregard for another person's dignity or well-being, when participation in, or exposure to the activity is an implicit or explicit condition for initiation or admission into, affiliation with, or continued membership in the group or organization.

Conduct constituting hazing is prohibited regardless of whether the person subjected to the conduct consents or voluntarily participates in the hazing activity, or whether any physical or mental harm results. Some **examples** of hazing are:

- Throwing substances or objects at individuals
- Activities that socially isolate or segregate an individual or group of students
- Activities that require uncomfortable, vulgar, or ridiculous apparel, or total and/or partial nudity
- Activities that involve water traditions or the misuse of water. Examples "Showering", "ponding", or "floating" new members of the community
- Line-ups and drills
- Memorization of organizational material
- Organizational tests on trivial information
- Interfering with adequate time for study
- Kidnapping and/or intimidation
- Engaging students at hours that prevent a full night of sleep
- Engaging students in activities without information about what is going to happen to them or during the activity
- Removing items from rooms including room furniture or doors
- Requiring frosh roles and assignments (bell frosh, etc.)

More examples of specific behaviors that may constitute hazing under this policy, as well as some commonly asked questions about hazing, are provided in the attached [Guidelines \[ii\]](#).

Consequences of a Violation:

Caltech expects its students to conduct themselves in a socially responsible and respectful manner, and to follow the Honor Code Handbook, Code of Conduct and Caltech Policy. Participation in hazing, either as an individual or as part of any student group, may result in serious individual and organizational consequences including, but not limited to, disciplinary action up to and including suspension; expulsion; permanent loss of organizational recognition; and loss of eligibility to remain a member of any club, team, or other Caltech-affiliated student group or organization.

Reporting:

Anyone who witnesses, experiences, or is otherwise aware of conduct that the individual believes to be in violation of this policy is urged to contact Caltech immediately. Individuals are encouraged to report such conduct to the Deans or Associate Deans, the Assistant Vice President for Student Affairs and Residential Experience, the Residential Life Coordinators, Resident Associates, Varsity Coaches, Security, or [Caltech Hotline](#).

Notes:

[i] California Penal Code Section 245.6

- (a) It shall be unlawful to engage in hazing, as defined in this section.
- (b) “Hazing” means any method of initiation or preinitiation into a student organization or student body, whether or not the organization or body is officially recognized by an educational institution, which is likely to cause serious bodily injury to any former, current, or prospective student of any school, community college, college, university, or other educational institution in this state. The term “hazing” does not include customary athletic events or school-sanctioned events.
- (c) A violation of this section that does not result in serious bodily injury is a misdemeanor, punishable by a fine of not less than one hundred dollars (\$100), nor more than five thousand dollars (\$5,000), or imprisonment in the county jail for not more than one year, or both.
- (d) Any person who personally engages in hazing that results in death or serious bodily injury as defined in paragraph (4) of subdivision (f) of Section 243 of the Penal Code, is guilty of either a misdemeanor or a felony, and shall be punished by imprisonment in county jail not exceeding one year, or by imprisonment pursuant to subdivision (h) of Section 1170. The person against whom the hazing is directed may commence a civil action for injury or damages. The action may be brought against any participants in the hazing, or any organization to which the student is seeking membership whose agents, directors, trustees, managers, or officers authorized, requested, commanded, participated in, or ratified the hazing.
- (e) Prosecution under this section shall not prohibit prosecution under any other provision of law.

[ii] Guidelines

Commonly Asked Questions:

Q: Isn't the definition so vague that anything can be considered hazing?

A: Read the definition, and then ask yourself the following questions:

- Does the activity involve humiliation or intimidation, or an illegal activity?
- Does it involve physical abuse (e.g., sleep deprivation)?
- Could it cause emotional distress or undue stress of any kind?
- Would you have any reservations describing the activity to your parents, the police, or a university official?
- Would you be worried if the activity were shown on the evening news?
- Would the current members refuse to engage in the same activity?

If the answer to any of the above questions is “Yes,” the activity is probably hazing.

Q: If someone agrees to participate in an activity, how can it be considered hazing?

A: In states that have laws against hazing, like California, consent of the victim can't be used as a defense. This is because even if someone agrees to participate in a potentially hazardous action, it may not be true consent because of peer pressure, intentional or unintentional threats, and the withholding of information about what will occur.

Q: Well, the state law says that hazing is okay if it is not physically dangerous.

A: Even the slightest mental hazing can be brutal and leave lasting psychological scars. Some hazing victims report that the mental hazing they endured was worse than being physically abused. Caltech holds its community members to a higher standard than does the State.

Q: If I am planning an activity, and am unsure whether it could constitute hazing, who should I ask?

A: You should speak with a staff member at the Institute. Depending on the activity, this could include the Dean and Associate Dean of Graduate Studies, the Dean and Associate Deans of Undergraduate Students, the Athletic Director, or the Assistant Vice President for Residential Experience or one of the Residential Life Coordinators.

Q: If a house or team asks first-year students to do all the work of the group (for example, construction, team set-up, clean-up, etc.) is that considered hazing?

A: Group responsibilities should be shared by the entire group. It is unreasonable and against policy to require freshmen to do all the work and limits their ability to be equal contributors and partners in the group if they are expected to manage everything.

Q: What are the expectations for bystanders under this policy?

A: Anyone who witnesses a violation, or potential violation of this policy, including behaviors that match the examples provided here, should report their observations.

Specific Activities:

Welcoming new members to our community is both valuable and necessary. Acceptable circumstances that allow for first-year focused events include, but are not limited to the following:

- House-wide voluntary leadership or service positions that include members of the first-year class
- PA, RA, RLC, or alley-sponsored activities that support the integration of first-year students into the community
- Events or activities that highlight the Caltech support network or organizational history
- Pranks and/or scavenger hunts that have been approved by the Office of Residential Experience

Activities that could be considered hazing when participation in, or exposure to them is an implicit or explicit condition for initiation to, admission into, affiliation with, or continued social or cultural membership in a group or organization include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Verbal, physical, or sexual abuse
- Activities that force or encourage consumption of any substances, including drugs or alcohol
- Deliberately interfering with adequate time for study
- Physically demanding, violent, or aggressive contests
- Any activity that interferes with ADA accommodations
- Unconstructive physical labor
- Freshman-specific assignments or tasks
- Expecting or encouraging illegal activity or property damage
- Withholding certain privileges
- Requiring work or activities as part of initiation into membership