

STUDENTS

After a Freshman's Death, Cornell U. Fraternities Ban Some of Their Own Events. But Is the Move Merely Symbolic?

By Wesley Jenkins | NOVEMBER 12, 2019

✓ PREMIUM



The Cornell Daily Sun

Twenty-eight of Cornell U.'s 30 fraternities agreed to a ban on regulated Greek events for the rest of the semester, following the death of a freshman. Across the country, five people have died in fraternity-related incidents in the past month.

After leaving an unregistered event late last month at the Phi Kappa Psi fraternity house, Antonio Tsialas, a Cornell University freshman, disappeared.

Earlier that evening, Tsialas had gone to dinner with his mother, who was visiting for Cornell's First-Year Family Weekend. He'd planned to take his parents on a campus tour the next day, but when he didn't show up, his mother reported him missing. Two days after Tsialas was last seen, his body was found at the base of Fall Creek Gorge, near the campus.

The weekend before Tsialas's death, a high-school student died near Pennsylvania State University after attending a party at an off-campus house occupied by Chi Phi fraternity members. The university suspended the chapter. Then two weekends after Tsialas's death, a freshman at San Diego State University died after attending an unregistered

party at a campus fraternity. As a result, the university suspended the remainder of its 14 fraternities; six were already suspended, and four others were being investigated, according to *The San Diego Union-Tribune*.

Cornell waited two weeks to suspend the Phi Kappa Psi fraternity, but students had already been sounding alarms and trying to take campus safety into their own hands. The university's Interfraternity Council banned fraternity social events for the rest of the semester. Still, questions remain: What about the unregulated events that preceded each of the deaths? Will the ban really make frat parties safer? And whose responsibility is that?

Before the council, known as the IFC, issued its ban, Maya Cutforth, president of the university's Panhellenic Council, proposed a different ban. All sororities would stop attending fraternity mixers until their members' safety was ensured.

While that ban did not pass, another one did, two days later. Cristian Gonzalez, president of the Interfraternity Council, organized a ban on all regulated fraternity events, except third-party-hosted formals, for the rest of the semester. Only two of the campus's 31 fraternity presidents did not sign the ban: Phi Kappa Psi and Alpha Delta Phi. Neither Cutforth nor Gonzalez could be reached for comment.

In an email to all Cornell students the day of the IFC ban, Martha E. Pollack, president of the university, commended the actions of the two Greek councils. "These welcome developments demonstrate that student leadership recognizes the seriousness of the situation," Pollack wrote. The university had suspended Phi Kappa Psi that morning.

The Cornell administration declined to comment beyond Pollack's email to students.

The urgency to enact change became increasingly clear as two students on other campuses were reported dead this week in fraternity-related settings. A student at Arizona State University was found dead on Monday in the campus's Greek Leadership Village. Then early Tuesday morning a fraternity member at Washington State University was found dead, and a statement by the local police department said the incident may have been alcohol-related. That same day, the university's fraternities and sororities suspended social events for the remainder of the semester.

Students have been at the forefront of fraternity-safety efforts before, with the University of Michigan's IFC suspending all social events in November 2017 amid hazing and assault allegations. After that voluntary suspension, the university mandated a deferred rush schedule in the spring of 2018, and six fraternities disaffiliated from the IFC to become independent entities the next fall. Also, a year after the death of an Ohio University freshman, Collin Wiant, student complaints of hazing led to the suspension of 15 Greek organization on that campus.

Focus
THE CHRONICLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Reining In Fraternities



What Colleges Can Do About Fraternities

The eight articles in this collection describe the strategies that colleges are using to try to prevent fraternities from harming students, and at the same time to preserve the positive values of the Greek system. Download this collection [here](#).

In response to the Cornell ban, one of the refraining fraternity presidents, Dillon Anadkat of Alpha Delta Phi, sent a statement of his own to *The Cornell Daily Sun* asserting that the ban only encourages more unregistered and off-campus events by doing away with the registered events. “It is time for fraternities to sit down with the university administration

to find more comprehensive, feasible, and tenable solutions to prevent such tragedies from occurring again,” Anadkat wrote. “Banning registered events seems more symbolic than substantive.”

Norm Pollard, a former dean of students at Alfred University, in New York, and a hazing-prevention expert, said that Cornell’s IFC ban is probably both substantive and symbolic. “It sends its own message that Greek life wants to have safer opportunities for their members to enjoy different festivities,” Pollard said. But “the reality of unregistered, off-campus parties is very concerning, and that will need administrative attention certainly.”

Cornell has been diligent in regulating fraternity parties over the years, Pollard said, but to curb reckless behavior at unregistered events, the university must work with others beyond the campus, including landlords, liquor stores, and law-enforcement officials. By working “collaboratively and cooperatively” with other vested parties, Pollard said, universities can be more proactive and create more opportunities to intervene.

“The challenge is you can never eliminate total risk for any event,” Pollard said. “It’s a collaborative effort because none of us want this type of tragedy to occur.”

Susie Bruce, director of the University of Virginia’s Gordie Center, which focuses on ending hazing and substance abuse, said that working with students to create a prevention plan based on evidence from experts often does the most to discourage risky behavior. But every college should still have a “laundry list” of further policies and reforms to pursue, she added, because prevention is a “resource-intensive” process.

“When you lose a student, it’s devastating,” Bruce said. “It’s making sure that you have an effective plan, that there’s lots of student input, and that you have that time to look through and see what was working.”

Correction (11/13/2019, 11:28 a.m.): This article originally stated that Cornell had not yet suspended Phi Kappa Psi. In fact, the fraternity was suspended on the same day that the university’s IFC voted to ban social activities for the rest of the semester. The article has been corrected.

Wesley Jenkins is an editorial intern at The Chronicle. Follow him on Twitter @_wesjenks, or email him at wjenkins@chronicle.com.

© 2019 The Chronicle of Higher Education

1255 23rd Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20037