

Fraternal Health & Safety Initiative

Violence Prevention Case Study Activity



ASSAULT AT THE CHAPTER HOUSE

Written by: Dave Westol, Limberlost Consulting

John is a freshman at State University. He is in the process of joining the Alpha Beta Fraternity during fall semester.

John is told that one of the main duties as a pledge is “Party Patrol” and “DD” or “Delta Delta” duty. Party Patrol refers to the practice of being paired up with two or more initiated brothers and circulating through the crowd during social events as an informal way of keeping order. Delta Delta is the term used for designated drivers – individuals who may be called upon to drive intoxicated guests to their houses or residence halls after the party.

One of the biggest social weeks of the semester is Homecoming week. On the Thursday night of homecoming week AB is hosting a large party. John has been assigned party patrol duty for the event. Alpha Beta is known to have the best parties on campus and rumor has it that the brothers expect a crowd that should exceed 300. Therefore, two party patrol teams of a member and a pledge have been assigned for the night.

A guest list – a list of all non-members who have been invited to the event – was compiled via social media. However, it is well-known that Alpha Beta will accept “walk-ins” who are not on the list as long as those individuals are women. Men who are not on the list are turned away. Door duty is usually assigned to older brothers but for this event several pledges have been told that they must check people into the event.

By 11:00 p.m., the basement of the fraternity house is packed and groups of people are spread around the living room and other common areas of the chapter house.

John attempts to shadow the older brother who was assigned to his team. The brother begins consuming alcohol and eventually tells John that, “You have the team, dude...I’m going to my room with my girlfriend.” John is confused but unwilling to confront the member. So, he searches for an older brother with some authority and finds the social chairman. The social chairman, who also has been drinking, tells John to begin checking people at the front door to “make sure they are on the guest list.” John says, “I don’t know what to do...I haven’t done that before.” The social chairman replies with a sarcastic, “Whatever, pledge – don’t bother me unless something big happens.”

John joins two other pledges at the door. They stand on the front porch and attempt to match names from the guest list with identification such as student IDs or a driver’s license. Around 11:45 p.m., three men approach the door and attempt to push their way by John and the other pledges. A verbal confrontation ensues. Several brothers, all of whom have been drinking, come to the porch and join the discussion. Text messages are sent to members to “Report to Red One” (the front door) which is code to come in a hurry. With the number of brothers growing rapidly one of the three individuals pulls the other two away and says, “We can go to other frats.” AB brothers continue to yell insults and derogatory comments at the three men as they walk away.

“Good job,” the pledges are told by the social chairman. The party resumes. No members join the pledges or provide assistance other than telling the pledges, “If those guys come back let us know.”

John checks with the social chairman at 1:00 a.m. to determine if the three pledges can go back to their residence halls. The social chairman, who by now is clearly intoxicated, tells John to “Man up, dude! You need to stay here at least another half-hour or so because we may need you to be a DD. This rager is so dope – we are gonna be kings tomorrow!”

At 1:15 a.m. the three men who previously tried to enter suddenly appear on the front porch. They approached by walking across the lawn and out of the line of sight of the pledges. One of the original three approaches John and exposes what appears to be the handle of a gun in the right front pocket of his pants. He says, “You ain’t so tough now without all of your bros with you” and shoves John backward. One of the other pledges attempts to text for help but his phone is knocked out of his hand. John holds up his hands, palms forward, in a gesture of “Wait” but the man who shoved him strikes John in the face with the butt of his gun. John is knocked off the porch and falls to the ground. The other two pledges slip inside the house and lock the front door. The non-member men walk away laughing and jeering at John.

Several members come to the front porch and help John to his feet. A member calls 9-1-1. John is subsequently transported to the university health center and hospitalized with a broken mandible (lower jaw), injuries to his left eye, and various abrasions and bruises. His parents are notified by hospital personnel pursuant to policy.

Five of the seven chapter officers including the vice president, the new member educator and the treasurer attend an emergency meeting called by the chapter president at 2:30 a.m. on Friday. The officers decide that the best course of action is to keep the incident, "Under wraps". The vice president is adamant about secrecy--"Dudes, if this gets out we're toast--'they' will take the charter". Although national fraternity policy calls for immediate notification of the national organization and the host institution if someone is taken to a hospital, no one contacts the national headquarters or the university.

John's parents drive seven hours to the hospital. They arrive at 9 a.m. on Friday, tired and angry. John's father immediately goes to the Student Affairs office and demands to speak with the Fraternity/Sorority Advisor. His father has several questions and concerns including the propriety of first semester students "Serving as bouncers" and compromising academic performance; the apparently unrestricted use of alcohol in the fraternity house and the failure of the university to protect its students against "Felons carrying weapons". John's parents also contact the chapter president to demand information regarding the payment of costs for the emergency transport, the hospital costs, cosmetic surgery and fall semester tuition for John since he may not be able to complete his classes.

Discussion Questions:

1. Most risk management situations involve several key concepts. What are the key concepts in this case—in other words, what can we learn from this case study that will help our chapter and members avoid similar situations?
2. Did this chapter follow risk management and harm reduction policies and practices?
 - a. What steps could the chapter have taken to reduce the possibilities or probabilities of this situation occurring?
 - b. Would this situation be different had members been at the door rather than pledges?
3. Did the use of social media to gather names and advertise the event impact the end result?
4. What role, if any, did alcohol play in the decision-making during and after the event?
5. After the initial confrontation at the door with the three pledges, what could chapter members have done to ensure that things did not go from bad to very bad?
6. What protocols does your chapter have in place regarding weapons and firearms?
7. What are the implications of not notifying the university or your fraternity headquarters about this incident? How would your insurance provider respond to this situation?
8. If you were a guest at this event, what, if anything, could you have done?

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CHAPTER SOCIAL EVENT AT THIRD PARTY VENDOR

Written by: Dave Westol, Limberlost Consulting

The Alpha Beta chapter is hosting a party at Bro's Sports Bar on a Friday night. The chapter social chairman works there and has worked out a deal with the owner to rent the entire bar from 9pm to midnight for \$1,500 which includes the first five kegs of beer.

Bro's security is on hand and monitors the door allowing only Alpha Beta members and pledges and their invited guests into the event. Other security personnel walk around the event making sure everyone is safe.

Bro's is packed with over 350 people attending the party. Everyone enjoys the free beer. When a bartender checks an ID and turns down an underage attendee it is no problem for that person to get a beer by having an older member get one and bring it to her or him.

However, trouble arises when a non-member male begins speaking in a loud voice at a girlfriend of one of the brothers while they are dancing. This happens just before midnight. The non-member uses several degrading terms for women. Other people within a radius of about ten feet stop dancing and watch the non-member, who is (a) clearly intoxicated—he is slurring his words and weaves back and forth as he speaks; and (b) his voice is increasing in volume and he is using profanity. However, no one does anything but observe.

As more people become aware of the situation they stop dancing. The DJ working the party turns off the music as a signal that the Alpha Beta event is over and the 100+ people waiting for the bar to open to the public are about to enter.

A sophomore member of AB named Tim has been drinking the entire night. Tim's girlfriend is the woman who was dancing with the non-member. Tim hears the non-member call his girlfriend a whore. He approaches the non-member and without warning shoves the non-member with one hand and curses him. Tim is approximately 6' 2" tall and weighs about 210 pounds from attacking the non-member who is 5' 7" tall and weighs about 155 pounds.

A Bro's security guard spots the situation and attempts to get through the crowd and separate Tim and the non-member. However, he is unsuccessful.

The non-member curses at Tim for shoving him. The reaction by Tim is quick—he strikes the non-member in the face with his fist and then pushes the non-member to the floor. As the non-member lays on the floor, Tim "heel stomps" him several times. Tim is wearing cowboy boots with metal cleats on the heels. Three other fraternity members, all of whom have also been drinking alcohol, join in kicking the non-member who covers his head with his hands and does not resist.

Several other members and the security guard then intervene by pushing Tim and the other fraternity members away and helping the non-member to his feet. The non-member is bleeding, trembling and disoriented. He is escorted to a back room of Bro's and told by another employee, "Dude, you'd better have someone look at your face—it doesn't look good. We have to call an ambulance."

Amid the chaos, the girlfriend who was dancing with the non-member was also knocked to the floor when Tim hit the non-member in the face and other members joined him. She cannot recall how she was knocked down and she doesn't know who contacted her. However, when she attempts to stand she realizes that her right knee has been injured. She leaves the event, returns to her sorority house and after applying ice to her knee and taking Advil she is taken to the health center by friends. Following an examination, she is told that she has suffered significant ligament damage to her knee that will require a lengthy rehabilitation.

Meanwhile, text messages and tweets are sent by several individuals at the party including people who know Tim and the non-member with descriptions of the situation. Several messages praise Tim for "stepping up and doing something about this jerk." Photos of the situation are posted on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram. Two videos taken of the incident from the moment that the non-member began cursing the woman to the moment that he was led from the party are also posted.

The following day (Saturday) two uniformed police officers and a detective come to the chapter house at 10:00 a.m. The detective asks if Tim is in the house. When Tim appears, he is placed under arrest along with the three other members who kicked the non-member while he was on the floor. Tim has been charged with felonious assault. The other members have been charged with assault and battery.

While Tim is being processed at the police station—photograph, fingerprints and other procedures—he is told by a police officer that the parents of the non-member are “very upset” and that they have already contacted a well-known local attorney about filing a civil suit for damages against Tim, the other members, the chapter and the national organization. “You’re in pretty deep, kid” the officer says.

The woman who suffered a knee injury calls the AB chapter president to ask about insurance coverage. “My parents are really upset about this” she tells the president. “My dad says he may sue the chapter if my medical bills aren’t paid.”

The chapter advisor calls the chapter president and says that the International Fraternity Headquarters is dispatching a staff member to ascertain what happened and to help manage this crisis.

Discussion Questions:

1. What specific steps could the chapter have taken to avoid this situation? Do you think the chapter followed risk management practices and policies? If so, what did the chapter do correctly? If not, what didn’t the chapter do that it should have done in terms of risk management?
2. What was the critical moment: at what specific point could this situation have been avoided or mitigated so that no one was injured?
3. What role could the people at the event who were near the non-member have played in reducing the possibility of an incident or situation?
4. Things happen quickly--very quickly--in social situations such as this one. What factors influence the escalation of a verbal confrontation to a physical confrontation?
5. Once the non-member became confrontational with a woman guest, what might have been done?
 - a. Are there risk management or harm reduction practices such as having sober monitors that might have reduced the tension in the situation?
 - b. Should the chapter have relied on Bro’s security to do something?
6. Can a person (Tim) be prosecuted and sued in civil court for the same transaction or situation? With that in mind, can the woman with the injured knee sue the fraternity and some members or officers?
7. What effect will this have on Tim? His parents? His academic work? His future?
 - a. If he is convicted, what effect will that have on his future? Felonious assault is a felony.
 - b. What about the other three members who are charged with assault and battery?
8. What are the insurance implications in this situation? Is the Fraternity absolved of any responsibility given the party was hosted at Bro’s? Why or why not?
9. What effect or impact in terms of time will be involved in this case for Tim and the three members?