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### UT sorority sisters accused of hazing don't get suspension lifted

By Shelley Rossetter, Times Staff Writer

*Three sorority sisters remain suspended as a judge wants more time for hazing case.*

TAMPA - On the eve of what would have been two of their graduations, three sorority sisters accused of hazing pledges at the University of Tampa were forced to put their academic futures on hold Friday.

Earlier this week, the students sought an emergency hearing to lift their almost year-and-a-half-long suspension and graduate on time, said Joseph Bryant, an attorney for the women.

The university holds its commencement ceremony at 10 a.m. today at the St. Pete Times Forum.

On Friday, Hillsborough County Circuit Court Judge Charles "Ed" Bergmann denied the request, declaring the case too complex to be decided in just a couple of hours.

Both parties will instead have time to prepare so they can present their information to him in the near future, Bergmann said.

The hazing included allegations that the pledges of the historically black Delta Sigma Theta sorority were "yelled at, made to run, do pushups, squats, eat garlic wrapped in Big Red gum and drink hot sauce, hold a match between their fingers while reciting a pledge, had rocks and grass thrown at them and that they were paddled," according to court documents.

The case was filed in circuit court Monday. UT officials sought to move it to federal court Thursday, but it was returned to circuit court Friday afternoon.

The students, who are identified in the suit as only as M.B., S.C. and L.P., have not been allowed in class, to meet with professors or on campus since their suspension in early April, Bryant said.

The women admitted to school officials, he said, that the running, pushups and squats took place, but denied the other allegations.

Bryant said white students accused of similar actions at the school received less-severe sanctions and that the women's race may have influenced unfair punishment.

John Campbell, an attorney for the school, said the university stands by its decision to suspend the students.

Hazing is a third-degree felony in Florida, and the University of Tampa has a zero-tolerance policy against it, he said.

According to the state statute, hazing includes "forced consumption of any food" and "forced physical activity that could adversely affect the physical health or safety of the student."

Shelley Rossetter can be reached at (813) 226-3374 or [srossetter@sptimes.com](mailto:srossetter@sptimes.com).

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