MU alcohol referrals up

Not all students are found guilty.

By Janese Silvey

Saturday, December 18, 2010

The number of University of Missouri students referred to administrators for suspected alcohol violations doubled from 2008 to 2009, but officials say the statistics don’t tell the whole story.

“I don’t think the general community needs to be worried about this,” said Kristen Temple, associate director of Residential Life. “I think if anything, what this says is that Residential Life staff is not ignoring situations of concern in the residential halls.”

The Department of Residential Life and the MU Police Department collect safety-related statistics annually. According to the latest report, 102 students in 2009 were arrested for alcohol infringements mostly for being minors in possession, said MU police Capt. Brian Weimer down from 120 in 2008 and 126 in 2007.

However, the number of students referred to MU administrators on suspicion of violating alcohol policies doubled, from 430 in 2008 to 883 in 2009. In 2007, 631 students were referred, which shows that the numbers fluctuate annually, Temple said. She stressed that not all of those referred students were found guilty of alcohol violations.

‘Temple didn’t know exactly what caused the increase, although there are a number of possibilities. Turnover among Residential Life staff is high, which means newer employees might have been more vigilant about patrolling the halls.
Also in 2009, three new residential halls opened, which increased the population of students living on campus. Those halls also have some suite-like rooms, where students might be more likely to try to sneak alcohol in because they’re more private, Temple said.

She could not pinpoint which residential halls, if any, might have seen more significant increases in referrals in 2009. But that’s because the statistics are two years old: Temple flags noticeable changes when they happen so she can address problems immediately.

“I work with staff to respond when we see spikes in certain communities much closer to the time it’s occurring,” she said. “If I notice these kinds of patterns, I talk to the community about what we need to do to get back on track.”

Students who are found guilty of alcohol violations typically are referred to the Wellness Resource Center for alcohol education. A second violation triggers probation and a letter to parents. Students guilty of three violations are temporarily kicked out of campus housing.

Kim Dude, director of the Wellness Center, said the increase in referrals might indicate an increase in enforcement, not just an increase in alcohol violations. And that, she said, would be positive because an increase in enforcement for alcohol violations typically results in a decrease in usage.

Off-campus groups also are turning attention to potential alcohol-related issues. A recent study of MU’s fraternities and sororities cited alcohol as one of several concerns, and the Office of Greek Life has formed a task force to study the issue next semester.

Currently, alcohol isn’t allowed at fraternities and sororities unless they go through a special exemption process, said Jana Basler, director of Greek Life.

Some have questioned whether the dry policy is appropriate. Tim Noe, president of the Missouri Student Association and a member of Lambda Chi Alpha, compared it to Prohibition. Practices, he said, don’t mesh with policies. “We need to take a realistic approach to the issue,” he said.

Greek housing is not campus property and is under jurisdiction of Columbia police. Police spokeswoman Jill Wieneke — who previously patrolled the Greek town area — acknowledged there are sometimes violations but said the current policies work.

City police can’t arrest students of legal age for drinking in fraternity houses, but police can respond to noise and other illegal activities. When they do, Wieneke said, officers also alert campus administrators about any policy violations.

Although she said police aren’t naive and know students drink, the current policies “put a little bit of a lid on it.”

Police and campus administrators say their No. 1 concern is student safety. Intoxicated students, regardless of age, are more at risk of being robbed, assaulted and a “host of other things,” Wieneke said.

“Police cannot condone underage drinking, but we’re aware that it’s not going to stop,” she said. “We manage it the best we can and enforce when appropriate, but our main goal is keeping everybody safe.”
Greek Life looks at MU experience

By Janese Silvey

Saturday, December 18, 2010

The Office of Greek Life at the University of Missouri is in discussions of how to make fraternity and sorority experiences on campus better for students and their families.

"We have a really good Greek community," said Janna Basler, director of Greek Life. "We want to help them become a great Greek community."

The office earlier this year contracted with NPower, an outside consultant, to assess the strengths and challenges within fraternities and sororities. Task forces have since been established to study areas of concern, and a new committee will tackle the top priority of alcohol on a more in-depth basis next semester.

Another issue flagged in the report is whether male freshmen are getting quality campus experiences when they join and live in a fraternity house their first year. Although women tend to acclimate to the university and feel part of its community, some fraternity members aren't getting that sense their first year, Basler said.

Tim Noce, president of the Missouri Student Association, said he joined Lambda Chi Alpha his freshman year but didn't move into the house until his second semester.

"I think it was important to my to my Mizzou experience to live in a residential hall at least my first semester," he said.

Talk of changing residential policies at fraternity houses is premature, though, Basler said.

Right now, MU would not have adequate residential hall space to house all freshmen who opt to live in fraternity houses, and most fraternities rely on those students to fill rooms. The main goal of the strategic review is simply to gauge Greek life at Mizzou and see whether fraternities and sororities should be meeting minimum standards in academics and other areas, Basler said.

"A lot of times, what happens when you review policies of any nature, it's reactive," she said. "We're trying to review policies being proactive. We want to be more proactive and develop better community standards."

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Speaker enlivens ceremony

Hagler talks to graduates

By Janese Silvey

Sunday, December 19, 2010

As graduation ceremonies go, the University of Missouri’s College of Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources commencement was anything but dull yesterday.

The afternoon ceremony began when Dean Thomas Payne challenged Vice Provost of Undergraduate Studies Jim Spain to a shouting match. Apparently, riling the crowds to shout “M-I-Z” then “Z-O-U” is a friendly competition the administrators have made a CAFNR graduation tradition.

Then, the state’s director of agriculture took the microphone and encouraged students to ride on the backs of shopping carts.

“I’ve got more degrees than a thermometer,” said Jon Hagler, referring to his bachelor’s from Truman State, master’s degrees from MU and a doctorate in political science from Washington University.

But he still likes a good whirl through the parking lot of Walmart once in a while, Hagler admitted. Sure, people look at him funny, “but I’m living, man,” he said. “I’ve got insurance. I can pay for all those cars I hit.”

Sporting a cowboy hat and boots with his traditional academic garb, Hagler delivered the keynote address at the afternoon commencement in the Hearnes Center. The point of the shopping cart story was to highlight a larger lesson that students should live and laugh and love even as they focus on more serious matters, such as their careers.

“Reality is waiting for you right around the corner, and sometimes that’s a thumbs-down,” Hagler said.

Not all of his jokes resonated with the 152 graduates, but the light-hearted tone might have been appropriate. Some of the graduates are facing some uncertain times.

A handful reported that they’re still looking for work, a couple of whom said they’ll move back in with mom and dad for a while until they can get on their feet.

Andy Loyd plans to continue to bartend in Columbia while looking for a more permanent position, and Bart Coslet suspected he’ll be killing time for a while as he puts feelers out for a job.

Still, getting to graduation day marked a significant achievement, graduates said as they waited for commencement to start. Loyd described graduation day as “shock and awe.”
Jamie Luef hasn’t snagged a job yet, either, although she has an interview in St. Louis. Yesterday, she was just proud to be graduating.

“It’s amazing,” she said. “I worked very hard to get here. I’m a little bit sad that I have to be a big girl now. It’s scary but exciting. Bittersweet.”

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The University of Missouri’s College of Veterinary Medicine has received a $3.4 million estate gift from a dog lover pleased with the treatment his pet received at the veterinary teaching hospital.

James Redhage of Pike County died in 2008 before the details of the endowment were hashed out, but legal issues have been cleared and the money released. The gift was announced this morning at the Reynolds Alumni Center on campus.

The money will be used to create an endowment whose proceeds will pay the annual salaries of three third-year residents in the college this year, as well as provide each of them with a $1,000 stipend for additional training and conference opportunities.

The inaugural awardees are Meredith Thoen, Kerry Rissetto and Dylan Buss; they were chosen by a faculty committee for their commitment to excellence in client communication and clinical performance.

Thoen said Redhage’s actions speak clearly about his “insight, generosity and compassion,” and she noted the gift will allow her to learn from leading experts in the field.

Buss said all the residents who work at the college are “really great.”

“To be picked out from such a group is really an honor,” he said.

John Dodam, chairman of the Department of Veterinary Medicine and Surgery, said Redhage’s gift will allow funding normally dedicated toward those salaries to go toward other expenses, relieving some of the fiscal pressure the school is facing.

“It gives us wiggle room with our finances to perform all our missions better,” Dodam said. “Truthfully, in today’s economy, the gift couldn’t come along at a better time to ensure quality clinical service and teaching.”

Dodam said he hopes the endowment will expand to include four residents next year.

Redhage donated the money in honor of his three dogs, Red, Pepper and Pepper II. He became familiar with the college after Red received treatment, according to the university.
In a letter that accompanied a previous donation he made to MU, Redhage wrote that it gave him “great satisfaction to have made this commitment to education in honor of my parents and my best friend, Red.”

Redhage worked for 45 years for Abel Oil Co., where he served as president for 22 years, a position he held when he died, according to his obituary.

Randy Anderson, chief financial officer for Abel Oil and a friend, said Redhage “would be so proud” of the college’s achievements.

“There are a tremendous amount of good things going on there,” Anderson said. “To him, it’s the best way to memorialize his relationship with his animals. He put his money where his heart was.”

Ronald Cott, director of development and associate dean of student and alumni affairs within the college, remembered Redhage’s interest in specialized education.

“He was very interested in helping to enhance the opportunity for education and advanced training,” Cott said in a statement.

“He had a passion for the human-animal bond, and his generous gift will help further the college’s mission of education and animal care immeasurably.”

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When buying toys for children with disabilities, let interests be your guide

By MARÁ ROSE WILLIAMS

He’s 8. What are they up to at that age? Is this too simple or could it be too complex? Or might he already have it?

Shopping for Christmas can be downright stressful, brain-wrecking, frustrating.

Toss into the mix that the child in question has special needs and the anxiety can notch up even more.

“Shopping for a child with a disability is tough, even for a parent,” said Jill Bamber, a former special education teacher whose 2-year-old son has cerebral palsy and low vision. He’s a student at Kansas City’s Children Center for the Visually Impaired.

“Don’t expect to run into a store with your list and just pick up something. Sometimes it takes a little research,” said the Leawood mother. “With enough thought, you could end up with the perfect gift.”

The most basic rule, experts said, is the same for disabled children as it is for others.

“Think about the person first, not the disability,” said Julie Binkhoff, assistant director of the Great Plains Americans With Disabilities Act Center at the University of Missouri.

“The first question to ask is, not what do I buy for a child who uses a wheelchair, but what are this particular child’s interests?”

Other thoughts: Is it a toy most any child would like?

Does the toy provide activities reflecting both developmental and chronological ages? Will the child be an active participant during use and will the toy encourage social engagement with others?

If the child likes science, look for a toy in that arena. Don’t worry, Binkhoff said, about trying to buy a toy you think will train or teach.
Thinking about whether the child would be able to use the particular item given his or her disability is the second question to ask yourself, she said.

"I would go so far as to say not only think about the child but think about what would be fun," said Sheldon Horowitz, director of learning disabilities resources at the National Center for Learning Disabilities.

"Not everything should be focused on building them up. Think what is it that this child will do for a while; drawing utensils for a child who likes to draw, for example."

If time is an issue, though, experts and parents said to keep it simple.

"Blocks, balls and bubbles," suggested Maureen Goddard, whose 4-year-old daughter has Down syndrome, delayed motor skills and speech. Too much color, too many lights and too much noise are often just too much, she said.

One of Bamber's son's favorite toys is colorful stacking cups. He likes to stack them up and find different ways to knock them down, she said.

"Simple toys sometimes are the most rewarding for kids because they can play with them in a lot of different ways and it doesn't have all those things you have to do to make it work," she said.

In general, Bamber thinks "cause and effect" are good. The car placed on the top of the ramp runs down the ramp.

Amie Bybee, whose 2-year-old son has multiple developmental challenges, remembers that one of the best gifts he ever got was a book.

Her son rides horses as part of his therapy to work on his low muscle tone.

"Because of that, he loves horses," Bybee said.

A relative gave him a textile book with pictures of horses where the tail was horse hair and the body real hide.

"He could see the picture and feel the horse and he loved it. It was a great gift because it went along with a part of his life," Bybee said.

Jeanette Worthington, director of the Children's Spot, which provides rehabilitative therapy to young children with disabilities at St. Luke's Hospital, suggests shoppers consider "not how old the child is but where they are developmentally. It can be frustrating if a child gets a toy that is too complicated for them."

Horowitz suggests that when possible, talk to the child and ask her or him to help you pick a gift for a child the same age.
“They are not going to recommend a gift they hate.”

To help take out the guesswork, parents suggested that shoppers first go online to ableplay.org, where toys are evaluated for their appropriateness within four disability categories — physical, communicative, sensory and cognitive.

Toys R Us and Amazon.com both put out toy guides that are specially designed for children with disabilities. And Lekotek online at lekotek.org is a leading resource on toys for children with special needs.

“Parents always like the practical gift — gloves or a hat,” Goddard said. “But I think people want to see the kid’s face light up when they open their gift.”

Shopping tips
Some suggestions from the National Institute for Play and the National Lekotek Center in toy shopping for a child with disabilities:

• **Multisensory appeal:** Does the toy respond with lights, sounds or movement? Are there textures, contrasting colors, a scent?

• **Method of activation:** Will the toy provide a challenge without frustration? What force or skill is required to activate it?

• **Where the toy will be used:** Can it be used on a wheelchair tray or by kids lying on their sides? Is it easy to store?

• **Opportunities for success:** Can play be open-ended with no definite right or wrong way? Is it adaptable to individual style, ability and pace?

• **Adjustability:** Does it have adjustable height, sound volume, speed, level or difficulty?

• **Safety and durability:** Consider the child’s size and strength and the toy’s durability. Can it be washed and cleaned?
MU survey aims to help potential dropouts

By Janese Silvey

Friday, December 17, 2010

Some 2,000 students at the University of Missouri haven’t yet registered for spring semester classes, and administrators want to know why.

Members of the MU Commission for Student Success created last spring plan to survey students who appear to be leaving before they graduate.

Although Jim Spain, vice provost for undergraduate studies, expects that nearly half of those students intend to return, he said the survey aims to help them cross whatever’s standing between them and enrollment, such as unpaid fines or other technical snags.

“A group of students in this pool have every intention of coming back, but we want to make sure we’re intentionally reaching out to them to help them resolve things that prevent them from registering for spring classes,” he said. “We also want to reach out to students who are leaving to get a sense of what’s going on. There may be some issues we can help them resolve so they can stay.”

MU’s retention rate is 84.4 percent, which reflects the number of freshmen who started in fall 2009 and returned this fall, said Ann Korschgen, vice provost for enrollment management. That’s above the national average of 78 percent for public four-year institutions, but administrators still want to improve it.

Some students are asked to leave because of poor academic performance, Spain said. But others are leaving before graduation with excellent grades for other reasons, such as financial or family problems. In those cases, the university might be able to help if advisers are aware of the issues, Spain said.

The survey should shed light on some of those reasons and also highlight whether a student’s behavior on campus – such as not studying enough – contributed to problems. Additionally, administrators hope to learn whether students sought resources to help them stay in school.

“We anticipate that the results from this study will help us identify which students might be at risk and also help us assess ways we could intervene with these students before they make the decision to leave MU,” Korschgen said.

The surveys are a new strategy, Spain said, but he expects them to be used every semester to try to catch students before they drop out. It’s a more personalized approach that lets administrators hear from every student, he said.
The retention effort comes at a time state and national leaders are trying to boost the number of adults with college degrees. Right now, about 35 percent of Missourians have at least a two-year degree. The goal is to boost that to 60 percent by 2025. Missouri also has nearly 750,000 residents — representing 24 percent of the population — who have some college credits but no degree, according to the Lumina Foundation for Education.

The Student Success Commission is still in the early stages, but Spain said the ultimate goal is to make sure administrators focus not only on getting students to MU but to also make sure they stay.

"When we work so hard to recruit students and admit students we’re confident can be successful at MU, we’re just as committed to doing things we can to support their success while they’re here," he said.

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Putting customers first

Seasonal shopping blitz doesn’t lower value of service

Published: December 20, 2010 3:00 a.m.

FORT WAYNE -- Shopper Joe Dumas isn’t a fan of holiday hoopla.

"Instead of creating a riot atmosphere, why not just have the sales all day long?" asked the 43-year-old Fort Wayne resident, who frowns on early-bird specials and other Christmas promotions.

"I don’t go to those (holiday) sales. Stores should just order more merchandise and put it on the shelves. They’d still make their money."

Dumas isn’t alone in his feelings. Sure, shoppers want big deals, but customer satisfaction isn’t just about price.

As yuletide shopping enters its final stretch, a marketing expert says retailers are smart to consider the role that customer service plays in purchases.

The National Retail Federation last week revised its holiday shopping forecast to a 3.3 percent increase over 2009. In October, the group in Washington, D.C., said sales this year would rise only 2.3 percent.

Even so, merchants would do well to not take customers for granted, said Christopher Groening, assistant professor of marketing at the University of Missouri, who researches customer service and satisfaction.

Free gift wrap, complimentary coffee, gift bags and similar offerings are all indicators that a merchant isn’t just fixed on making a buck, he said.

"It is important that people feel like they’re not just a number," Groening said. "Little things do mean a lot. When you pull up to the store’s entrance, is it easy to get in, and once you’re in, how are you treated?"

Groening said there is a segment of consumers whose only concern is low prices, but for others, customer service determines whether they’ll loosen their purse strings.

"There are touch points that decide if a person shops at a particular store," Groening said.

A greeting that comes across as "plastic" isn’t likely to melt hearts, he said.
“People can tell when a smile is forced,” Groening said. “It’s like when you call a customer service line and you can almost hear the pages turn as the person on the other line talks to you.”

Going beyond

David Skelly is the manager of Uncle Bill’s Pet Center in Fort Wayne. Store associates there try to go beyond what is required of them, he said.

“We carry out dog food to people’s cars,” Skelly said. “We’ve had customers say they like that because they don’t get it at (other pet outlets).”

The pet store, 6339 W. Jefferson Blvd., also provides free delivery for large fish-tank purchases and will test the chemical levels for patrons without a fee.

“They just have to bring in a sample from their tank,” Skelly said.

The store also avoids a cookie-cutter approach when addressing customer concerns, he said.

“We look at every situation on its own merit,” Skelly said. “We’re very service-oriented.”

Groening said that is lacking at many other retailers. A store that refuses to take into account extenuating circumstances if a customer misses the deadline to return merchandise can be viewed as harsh.

“You want to make an effort to treat people as individuals,” he said.

“Stores should empower non-managerial employees to grant special exceptions. People shouldn’t always be told by associates that they’re just following the rules.”

Ann Wespon of Fort Wayne said she doesn’t patronize stores where staffs are rude — no matter how cheap the prices.

“If they treat me wrong, I’m gone,” said the 46-year-old production worker.

Wespon said she has noticed that some sales clerks “can get attitudy” when crowds start pressing in on them.

“I just say have a blessed day,” Wespon said. But she also will think twice about shopping with them again.

“Overall, I’ve had good experiences shopping this year,” said Wespon, who recently bought toys at the Family Dollar outlet next to George’s International Market on Broadway. “Everybody has been nice for the most part.”

Officials at the National Retail Federation are optimistic.

“The start to the holiday season has surpassed all expectations,” Matthew Shay, federation president and CEO, said in a statement.
While employment data is still a concern, we are starting to see improvement in other economic indicators that support an increase to our forecast. In order to sustain this momentum for retailers and the U.S. economy, there must be a renewed focus on jobs as we enter the new year.
EPA gets extra month to draft Hinkson plan

By Jodie Jackson Jr.

Sunday, December 19, 2010

The Sierra Club has agreed to give the Environmental Protection Agency a one-month extension of a court-ordered Dec. 31 deadline to complete a pollution control plan for Hinkson Creek.

But representatives of Boone County government, the city of Columbia and the University of Missouri have pleaded for more than a year for a new study of the Hinkson’s aquatic biology and hydrology before EPA enacts stormwater control requirements that local officials say could cost tens of millions of dollars.

County, city and university officials are scheduled to meet with EPA regulators at 10:30 a.m. tomorrow in the EPA’s Region 7 office in Kansas City, Kan. The meeting was requested by Columbia Mayor Boh McDavid and Southern District Boone County Commissioner Karen Miller.

The EPA’s 30-day period for collecting public comment on the latest pollution-control draft recently expired. As the result of a federal lawsuit brought by the Sierra Club and the American Canoe Association, EPA was ordered 10 years ago to have a Total Maximum Daily Load — or TMDL document drafted for 174 streams that were in violation of the Clean Water Act. TMDL determines the maximum amount of pollution that a stream can receive and still meet water quality standards.

The TMDL process originally was handled by the Department of Natural Resources, which last fall presented a draft that called for the city, county and university — joint holders of a stormwater release permit — to reduce by two-thirds the amount of stormwater reaching the Hinkson. EPA took over the TMDL draft in October, and the final document requires a 39.6 percent runoff reduction.

Local government officials and stormwater managers contend that a sizeable reduction in runoff will be prohibitively expensive. They also question the need for pollution control measures, citing the adoption of city and county stormwater ordinances and other measures that regulate the effect of development. The TMDLs suggested by both DNR and the EPA identified stormwater, rather than a specific substance or chemical, as the reason for the creek’s poor water quality.

"The Boone County Commission along with our permit partners are adamantly opposed to the use of a surrogate in the current EPA draft TMDL for Hinkson Creek,” Miller said in a letter to EPA on Dec. 1.

Miller has said not knowing exactly what the TMDL was targeting was like “fighting a ghost.” Boone County stormwater manager Georganne Bowman said the surrogate approach was “just taking a stab in the dark.” Miller also warned that implementation of a TMDL based on years-old data could have the "unintended consequences of pushing development into other sensitive watersheds.”
McDavid submitted a letter similar to Miller's, but that act came under fire by Ken Midkiff, conservation chairman of the Osage Group of the Sierra Club and a Tribune columnist, and Columbia First Ward Councilman Paul Sturtz, who said the mayor did not speak for the city because the matter was not discussed by the city council.

"We were not involved in any discussions about the EPA rules," Sturtz said. "I think we've been left high and dry on this issue, and I don't think this is something that I can stand behind as an elected official right now."

Midkiff said the 31-day extension agreed to for the completion of the Hinkson TMDL was offered as a compromise to the 60-day request made by EPA staff.

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