

Boren Announces Comprehensive Plan to Combat Alcohol Abuse

NORMAN – University of Oklahoma President David Boren yesterday announced a broad set of initiatives aimed at combating student alcohol abuse. The new policies will go into effect at the beginning of next semester, which starts on January 18, 2005. Between now and the beginning of the semester, the university Student Affairs staff will work with student groups and national fraternities and sororities to take steps to implement the new policies.

President Boren said, "Our goal is to have at OU a policy to curtail alcohol abuse by students which become a national model of best practices for other colleges and universities to follow. These policies send a strong signal that alcohol abuse will not be tolerated at the University of Oklahoma."

Boren appealed to others for help. He said, "Obviously, the university cannot solve the problem by itself. There is a national epidemic of alcohol abuse by underage drinkers. In our own state, teenage drinking among high school and junior high students is above the national average. Last year, nationally, among those under 25 years of age, over 1,400 deaths of college students occurred that were directly related to alcohol abuse. (*Citation: Task Force on College Drinking supported by the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism – which references a 2002 study by Hingson for this statistic.*) It is going to take the help of parents and university leaders all across the state and indeed all across the nation for us to be successful."

Boren conceded, "No program, no matter how broad, will completely eliminate the problem, but if we can dramatically reduce harmful and dangerous binge drinking, it will be well worth the effort."

Boren said, "These policies are not meant to be punitive or negative, they are issued for the benefit and safety of our students. I hope that I will never again have the sad duty to discuss the tragic loss of a son or daughter due to alcohol abuse with grieving parents and family members."

Boren also said, "I truly believe that the changes I am suggesting will make our community stronger and safer. The policies that will impact fraternities and sororities will make them stronger institutions for developing scholarship, fostering leadership, building character, and developing true friendships."

Boren announced the following major elements of the new alcohol policies:

- (1) All fraternities and residence halls will be dry. Sororities are already dry. Alcoholic beverages will not be allowed inside Greek houses and OU dormitories or on the grounds surrounding them. Fraternity officers and members will sign an agreement to abide by this policy which will be strongly enforced. Boren said that we cannot ignore studies by the National Institutes of Health and the Harvard School of Public Health which indicate that there is a strong relationship between binge drinking and the availability of alcohol in housing including Greek system housing. (*Citation: Task Force on College Drinking supported by the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism. Binge Drinking on America's College Campuses, Harvard School of Public Health.*) Binge drinking is defined as a male who consumed five or more drinks in a row or a female who consumed four or more drinks in a row at least once in a two-week period. Studies show those binge drinkers are far more likely to be involved in alcohol poisoning deaths, car accidents and other accidental deaths as well as declining grades and academic achievement. (*Citation: The Harvard School of Public Health College Alcohol Study*)
- (2) Enforcement of campus alcohol violations and punishments will be increased.
- (3) To curtail alcohol abuse on and off campus, the university will adopt a mandatory, minimum "3 Strikes" policy. The first alcohol violation, whether off campus or on campus, will automatically result in appropriate parent/guardian notification and further alcohol education. A second offense will automatically also carry parent/guardian notification and an appropriate sanction. A third violation will result in automatic suspension from the university for at least one semester. Parents/guardians will be informed of this policy at the time their son or daughter enrolls at OU.

- (4) The university will support strengthening and enforcing city ordinances in Norman to shut down what have become "party houses" where students abuse alcohol.
- (5) Parties at which alcohol is served that are sponsored by campus-affiliated organizations shall be restricted to only Friday nights and Saturday nights to reduce the negative impact on academic performance that comes from the current practice of many such parties occurring on school nights.
- (6) Transportation to and from off campus parties sponsored by campus-affiliated student organizations shall include designated drivers or bus transportation provided by the sponsoring group. Those attending in private vehicles will be required to check car keys at the door and meet an appropriate sobriety standard before being allowed to drive themselves home. This policy is aimed at reducing the incidence of driving under the influence of alcohol.
- (7) An enhanced statement on prohibited hazing activities by any campus organization will be developed and implemented, patterned on a model used at the University of North Carolina. In the Greek system, fraternity and sorority officers will sign a pledge to abide by this policy and report violations. It will also be provided to pledges/associate members who will sign a statement promising to report violations. This statement on prohibited hazing activities will also be given to the pledge's parents/guardians, who will be urged to report any violations.
- (8) An anonymous, confidential hotline will be established where violations of the anti-hazing and dry fraternities and residence hall policies may be reported.
- (9) There will be further expansion of alcohol education programs. All entering students must complete these programs to remain in good standing. This year these programs reached the large majority of new students, but in the future completion of the course will be required of all new students. Attendance at these programs shall be mandatory before any student will be eligible to participate in sorority or fraternity recruitment.
- (10) Unregulated "Summer Rush" conducted by fraternities will be strictly prohibited. A limited number of publicly announced pre-registered dry events may be allowed in the period prior to formal fraternity recruitment. The events shall be attended by members of Interfraternity Council and monitored by alumni members of the organization.
- (11) The IFC will be asked to consider if it is feasible to adopt a program patterned on that in use at the University of Mississippi in which fraternity rush takes place in mid-October as opposed to the beginning of the semester.
- (12) The cooperation of student leaders will be sought, including the Interfraternity Council, Panhellenic Council, National Panhellenic and Latino Greek Council as well as national/international leadership of Greek organizations with OU chapters. The university will seek to work with these organizations in a collaborative fashion.
- (13) Campus-affiliated student organizations will be required to present a plan annually for organizationally sponsored events prior to any activities at which alcohol is served.
- (14) The university will establish a formal relationship with licensed alcohol counselors for immediate student referrals.
- (15) The university will enhance the SafeRide program by seeking to establish a voucher system with a local taxi or public transportation company to provide safe rides to discourage drinking and driving.

