Furman University Impacts Student Underage Drinking through Increased Enforcement, Policy Enhancements, and Campus/Community Collaborations

As approximately 75% of the undergraduate population at Furman University is age 20 and younger, underage drinking has been an issue of concern that the Enforcing Underage Drinking Laws (EUDL) College Discretionary grant has helped address.

During the first year of the Palmetto Initiative for Campus and Community Collaboration (PICCC), party patrols were not conducted in the Furman target area. When grant funding was provided and party patrols began (2009), Furman students were surprised to see local Alcohol Enforcement Team (AET) officers arriving at their parties. The University had informed students of the expected party patrol events and the laws concerning underage drinking, including minor in possession and providing alcohol to minors. Nonetheless, students did not believe patrols would actually happen, much less that they would be cited. Students were upset and enlisted the help of student government to evaluate Furman’s existing alcohol policy. The evaluation resulted in a new campus policy passed in May 2010 allowing alcohol in the on-campus apartments where of-age students reside but still prohibiting alcohol in the residence halls where underage students reside. The policy specifically prohibits parties, drinking games, large quantities of alcohol, and use of alcohol by minors; it includes increased enforcement, strict sanctions for alcohol violations, and the addition of birthdates on all Furman University IDs to aid officers with alcohol enforcement.

The University also increased the responsibilities of the Resident Assistants (RA’s) by incorporating rounds each week on Thursday, Friday, and Saturday nights. During RA and FRAD (FReshman ADvisors) training, student staff is trained on the procedures and strategies for dealing with underage drinking. In addition, all new students attend a residence hall meeting the first week of school to discuss alcohol laws, campus policies, enforcement, and consequences related to underage drinking that include strict sanctions. Upon completion, each student is asked to sign an online document acknowledging that they have read and understood the alcohol policy.

As a result of this grant, the University now has a central office to provide alcohol education, interventions, and referrals as necessary. The grant coordinator works closely with the student conduct board to guarantee appropriate sanctions are provided to students who violate the policy. Further, the grant coordinator has a close relationship with campus and local law enforcement to ensure environmental strategies are put into place to reduce underage drinking, which includes compliance check operations, off-campus party patrols, safety checkpoints, and fake ID enforcement.

AET efforts have resulted in improved compliance from 72.7% (2008) to 84% (2011), reduced calls to law enforcement to respond to problem locations off-campus and a reduced number of off-campus alcohol-related citations—from 30 underage drinking and 2 alcohol transfer [adult provider] violations at off-campus parties in 2009 to 0 underage drinking and 0 alcohol transfer violations in 2011. Further, University Police can now respond to campus parties in a way similar to party patrols off-campus. The use of I-pads, breathalyzers, and cameras has proven to be an asset to the campus investigative and judicial processes.

In just one year, alcohol violations have decreased for of-age students and increased for underage students from 82 in 2010 to 138 in 2011. Data from the 2011 CORE survey suggest that underage use has not increased, and university officials are starting to see a shift in student behaviors. Anecdotal responses indicate that students feel the strict sanctions are not worth drinking underage or providing alcohol to minors, which can result in each party host being charged with up to $750 in fines.

For further information, contact:

Stephanie Boyd, Furman University
Phone: 864-294-2292
Email: stephanie.boyd@furman.edu

Matt Smith, Phoenix Center
Phone: 864-467-3312
Email: msmith@phoenixcenter.org

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