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Employer survey reveals bias against pot users

BY JIM WORLEIN
Of The Emerald

The results of a recent survey of Eugene area manufacturers on the subject of marijuana, conducted by the ASUO Drug Information Center, gave its author, Bob Radding, a few surprises.

Radding, an anthropology major at the University, told the Emerald "The results surprised and scared me a little. There was a lot of contradiction."

Radding did the survey fall term under the sponsorship of the Drug Information Center. The Center used the 17-page report for their seminar on psychoactive drugs last term.

Questionnaires were sent to 140 area manufacturers in an "attempt to establish the extent to which local business attitudes regarding marijuana use affect employability."

The questionnaires were sent only to manufacturers (not stores, construction outfits, and such) with five employees or more.

Forty-two confidential responses were returned to the center and Radding compiled the subsequent results in his analysis.

It was found that many employers who ask prospective employees about their use of

drugs ask the question in reference to all drugs, with alcohol and tobacco included. Radding makes the presumption that this indicates that there is social awareness of the entire drug abuse problem.

For a "head" looking for work, the above statement would probably be the only heartening thing in the report for him or her.

Stereotypes remain

As the report continues with answers to the survey it becomes clearer that the people responding still have stereotyped attitudes towards pot and its users.

The report states, "It is clear that negative, antisocial connotations prevail in the Eugene business community towards marijuana."

Two questions in the survey dealt with attitudes of employers towards marijuana smokers as individuals. Seven per cent said they could recognize a marijuana user by sight while 87 per cent they could not.

However, when respondents were asked to identify outstanding characteristics of a marijuana user, their answers were overwhelmingly detrimental to the user. Over 80 percent said a user was either unreliable, lazy, indifferent or slow, while only 18 per cent said they were calm, perceptive or not noticeably different.

Two questions were asked

regarding the relative possibility of private users (no arrests) and public users (at least one previous arrest) being hired. Only 15 per cent of the employers would hire private users, defined in the question as a person whom the employer knew used marijuana, but hadn't been arrested.

Although it might appear that a user in Eugene has little chance of procuring employment, the report did go on to say, "Even though the response to the questions would suggest that employment opportunities for a marijuana user are at a minimum in Eugene...employers were asked if their employment process included questioning applicants as to their use of marijuana....An overwhelming 78 per cent answered that this questioning is not part of their employment process..."

If an employer has a suspicion that one of his workers uses marijuana his action might be severe, as indicated by the survey. Nine per cent would take no action and at the other extreme 24 per cent said they would fire the employee. "Discuss suspicions with employee" and "issue a warning to employee" each garnered 35 per cent.

Doctors opinions preferred

Employers felt that the most credible sources of information on marijuana were medical (74 per cent), private (12 per cent) and governmental (10 per cent).

When asked if they would accept the opinions of their most credible source no matter what position the source took on marijuana, 73 per cent said they would accept it unconditionally.

According to Radding's report there is a problem in distributing information on drug abuse. The last question asks of knowledge of recent studies. Response indicated that information sources are widely distributed, with medical (35 per cent), governmental (27 per cent), private (20 per cent) and other (two per cent) again the choices. Sixteen per cent of the respondents answered none.

Radding asserts that the report show that drug education programs are not getting through to everyone.

He feels that employers in the area "are conservative on the issue of marijuana" but returned questionnaires "had attitudes from all different extremes."

Radding doesn't know if the report is any indication of national or state trends but the Drug Information Center has sent (and has gotten requests from other institutions) copies to the National Institute of Mental Health, state legislators and other agencies concerned with drug abuse.

The entire text of the report may be examined in the Drug Information Center, room 1 EMU.

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