

UNIVERSITY

OPS emphasizes common sense as the key to safety

By Kirsten Lucas
Emerald Contributor

The first thing that comes to many students' minds when they think of the Office of Public Safety is parking tickets. However, campus crime prevention officer Suzie Hunter likes to think of OPS as the University's "kinder and gentler police department."

OPS, formed in the early 1970s, is in charge of campus crime prevention, bicycle registration, keys and locks, occupational safety, environmental health and parking enforcement. Its jurisdiction encompasses the entire University campus and outlying University property.

Students may not realize the diversity of OPS's responsibilities until they find themselves in trouble.

"We'll let you in if you've locked yourself out of your office," Hunter said. "We'll come out and jump start your car. We'll rescue you if you're stranded on campus. Those are the types of services you're not going to get out of a police department because they don't have the time."

OPS employs 15 professionally-trained campus security officers and two supervisors, who are armed only with flashlights, keys, handcuffs and radios. It also contracts with the Eugene Police Department for five armed officers and a sergeant who assist public safety officers with law enforcement.

In addition to these professionals, University Housing employs student security patrols, supervised by OPS. These students patrol the dorm areas in pairs, acting as extra eyes and ears for OPS. The student patrols primarily look out for out parties and doors propped open — the latter pose a particular security hazard in the residence halls.

OPS supervisor Bob Brown, who has been at the University since 1986, finds the people he encounters on his patrols to be cooperative unless, of course, they're up to no good. He is taken seriously by those in need of assistance, who, incidentally, make up the majority of his contacts. However,

"when it comes to law enforcement," he said, "students sometimes doubt my authority."

When he approaches someone behaving suspiciously, he relies on his own presence and "the color of authority" — his uniform — to get people to follow his instructions. And don't think because he's not armed and dressed in blue he won't arrest you.

Students should know that all public laws apply on campus. Conversely, students should not assume a false sense of security here. Student status does not exempt anyone from crime or punishment.

"The attitude that a lot of kids have when they get here is that 'I'm here and the laws of the outside world apply to the outside world and not necessarily to me because ... I'm where the long arm of the law can't reach me,' and that's not true," Hunter said.

Hunter said she has noticed that students have become increasingly confrontational toward OPS officers recently. "In the last five years," she said, "I have noticed a change in students and how blatant they are with some of the (illegal) things that they do."

She cited this type of behavior as the cause of riots that occurred near the University in the past two years, and said she expects similar incidents to occur in the future as long as bad feelings persist between students and authorities.

Brown said, "I would like to see a better rapport with students."

According to EPD statistics, theft and alcohol-related violations are currently the most frequently committed crimes in the University vicinity. While theft has risen steadily, alcohol-related violations have increased dramatically over recent years. These violations include minor in possession of alcohol, minor on restricted premises, public drinking and intoxication.

During the 1989-90 school year, 637 alcohol-related crimes and 471 thefts were reported in the University area. Of the thefts, 130 were of bicy-

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