

# Strict dorm alcohol policy comes under debate

By Carrie Dennett  
Emerald Reporter

In response to a federal "zero-tolerance" attitude toward alcohol abuse, University Housing this fall is adopting its own hardline stance to drinking in the dorms.

"We felt that it was necessary, both through federal regulation and the need to provide a pleasant surrounding for our residents, to take a somewhat more aggressive stance in implementing the policies that are already in place," said Marge Ramey, University Housing director.

Starting this year, in situations identified as "parties," resident assistants will send the residents of the room in which parties are held directly to the Office of Student Conduct. In previous years, students were sent to the student manager or resident director of their residence hall complex.

For their night of revelry, students could face penalties ranging from community service to expulsion from the dorms.

The University, along with other institutions receiving federal funding, could have funds pulled if it does not comply with the new regulations about reporting alcohol abuse.

The federal definition of alcohol abuse is any use of alcohol by someone under the age of 21, and use by those over 21 at a level above that which is deemed safe, determined by an individual's body weight and

the time period in which the drinks were consumed.

The ongoing problem with carrying out this policy in the residence halls is how to define a "party." It is loosely defined as any gathering involving alcohol, noise, and more than just a few people, but the specific definition is something RAs have to grapple with.

"It's a very gray area, and I feel they want us to make a black-and-white definition," said Mike Springer, who is beginning his second year as an RA.

"They make it very clear that we can't overlook anything, that we can't let things slide by," Springer said.

**'It's good on paper, but in actuality it's really hard to enforce.'**

— Shannon Mills

"But what do they consider turning our heads?"

"Each RA has a different idea of what a party is," said Kim Henshaw, an RA in Bean Complex. This can create conflict with residents if a similar situation is dealt with more harshly by one RA than by another.

"We try very hard to keep uniformity, but it's hard to always have the same voice," Ramey said.

"What a party is is really my judgment at the time," said RA Shannon Mills. "That's the toughest part, figuring out what's a party and what's not."

"It's more confusing because last year we felt the RA had much more control over a situation," Springer said. "Now, we feel with the zero-tolerance alcohol policy, the threat of losing funding for the University, that we no longer can really define what's a party and what's not a party, without somewhere along the line somebody getting in trouble for it."

Ramey said there are no penalties facing an RA who makes an incorrect decision about a party situation, outside of existing measures that would apply to any problem an RA was having with his or her job.

All three RAs agree that there seem to be fewer parties in the dorms than this time last year. Residents seem to be leaving the dorms to party, rather than just going to another dorm, because they know the policy is being enforced in all the dorms, Henshaw said.

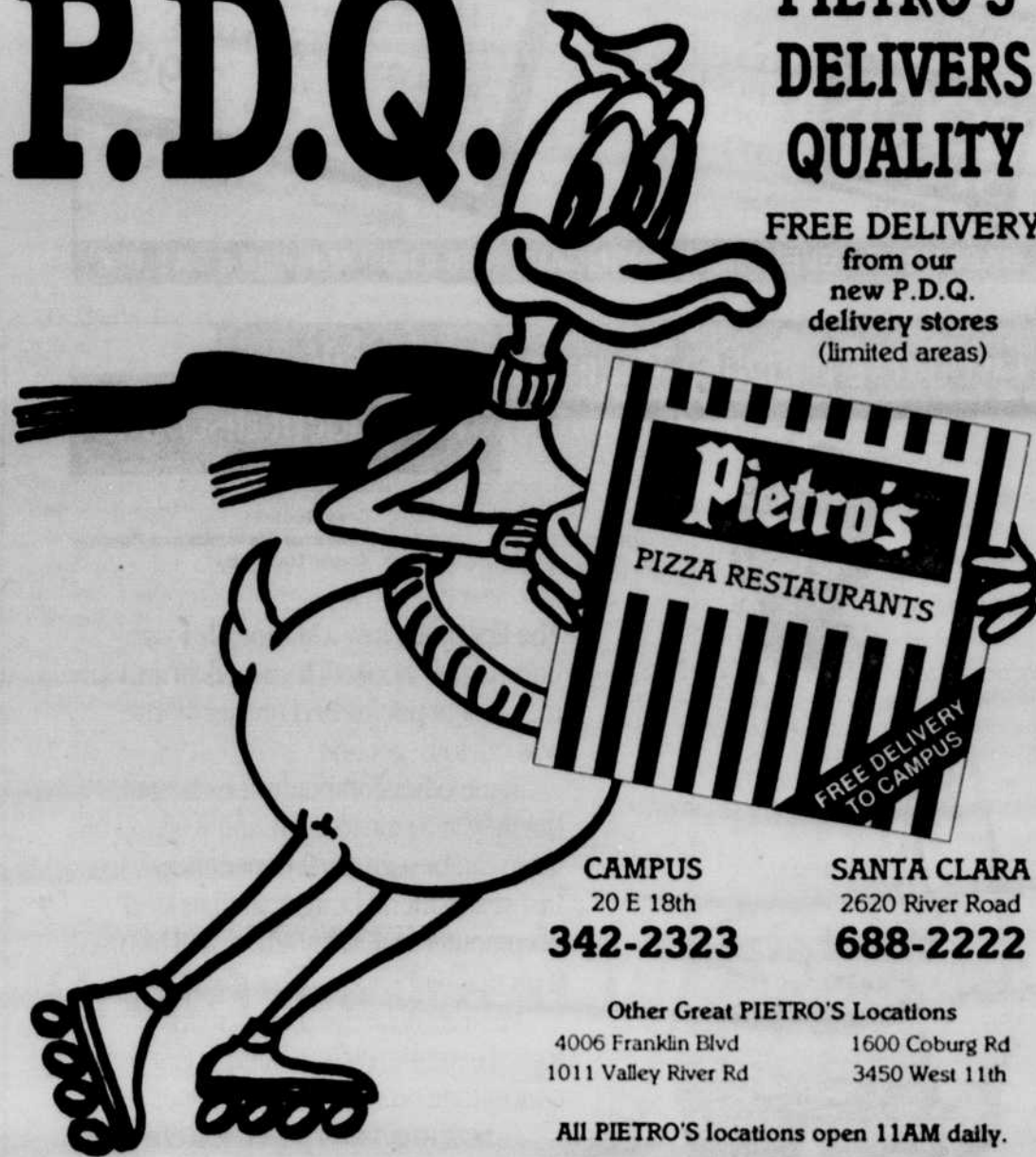
"What I've noticed is that it's a little scarier," Mills said. "When you go through the conduct system, you don't know what your punishment is going to be. You know you are going to go to conduct, but you don't know anything past that."

This brings up a question: Does the policy actually minimize drinking by residents, or does it just push them out of the dorms and possibly into drinking and driving situations?

Springer said it will be interesting to see what happens when the weather turns bad. He said he believes more students may try to stay in the dorms to party, or

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