



Springtime clashes between city police and partying students in 1989 and 1990 did not return to campus neighborhoods in 1991, an effect many attribute to efforts of a

community relations task force that formed two years ago. This photo was taken at a party during the spring of 1990, shortly before tear-gas was used.

## Students, police see fragile relations improving

By Dan Eisler  
Emerald Contributor

Just over a year ago, it seemed off-campus confrontations between students and police might become part of University life as much as other revived aspects from the early '70s.

But unlike the resurgence of Birkenstocks or sideburns, student-police clashes have been kept to a minimum, with both sides working to avoid a flashback to the time of anti-war riots.

As a result, efforts at improved communications by a community relations task force have taken the pressure off the party situations that led to the melees of 1989 and 1990.

The task force — composed of representatives from the police department, the University, and the community — formed in response to the May 1989 party that ended in bottle-throwing and tear gas. The task force took steps to prevent such subsequent incidents, and examined issues such as relations between police and students.

One result has been a greatly improved

level of communication between police and the university community, said Sgt. Mike Cline of the Eugene Public Safety Department.

Previously, communication between the two sides was minimal, but both sides have moved away from an "us versus them" mode, through talking with various groups and organizations in the community, and with several forums held in the wake of the clashes, Cline said.

The task force has also invested a tremendous amount of energy and time in promoting student-police cooperation, leading to changes in police procedure and the establishment of student response teams to prevent similar disturbances, he said.

In the past, a "strike force" of four to six officers was dispatched from downtown to respond to campus-area complaints, Cline said.

Now, when police respond — earlier than in the past — to complaints, the complaints are investigated by officers assigned to the campus area, which Cline hopes promotes mutual recognition of

individuals on both sides.

Also, when police are dispatched to a party, their approach is to ask for a host or responsible participant, Cline said.

In addition, student response teams were established last year to defuse potential police-student confrontations, he said.

Originally, students patrolled the West University Neighborhood on weekends, Cline said. During the 1990-91 school year, the arrangements were modified for police to page the teams in the event of a party, and more recently, teams have been notified by cellular phone.

The campus Office of Public Safety provides the equipment and information, and the response teams are called in by OPS to provide student-to-student mediation, OPS director Carey Drayton said.

The program was extremely effective, and the teams lessened the strain and staff time needed for police to patrol the area for parties, Cline said. "The police department loved it."

A lot of work has been done by everyone to repair potential breaks in the relationship, Cline said. "Not that we won't

continue to have problems, but communication is the key to whole thing."

Without these changes, the clashes conceivably could have moved to the severity of the early '70s anti-war demonstrations, but they lacked a vital imperative, said Cline, who experienced the riots of that period.

"We weren't looking at anything that rallied around a cause," Cline said. "Having a wild party is not a reason for the University (community) to get behind (students) and start burning buildings."

Moreover, the student population wasn't united about the parties — particularly when it was other students who called to complain about them in the first place, he said.

In addition, in the 1989 and 1990 disturbances, police never responded until they received citizen complaints, Cline said, adding that EPD doesn't have enough officers to make loud parties a high priority.

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