

OLCC useless against student will

Underage drinking will always be a part of college, no matter how hard the state liquor control commission tries to stop it

Cops in shops pose as clerks to snatch fake IDs. Undercover officers hang out by liquor stores looking for minors in possession of alcohol. Parties are ransacked in search of underage drinkers. All these are efforts by the Oregon Liquor Control Commission (OLCC) in an ongoing war against underage drinking. And while the intentions of the OLCC are certainly honorable, it is time to admit the program has been a complete failure.

The OLCC is a task force positioned in Eugene and Corvallis dedicated completely to stopping underage drinking. The basic strategy is to catch minors in the act of either buying or consuming alcohol and



Brian Diamond

then hit them with stiff penalties. Information distributed by the University around campus warns students of the dangers of getting caught with alcohol as a minor. A minor in possession citation (MIP) usually runs about \$90, while being caught with a fake ID can cost as much as \$350. For the average college student, these fines can mean some major economic hardships. The hope behind the severity of the fines is that minors will weigh the benefits of drinking against the potential punishment of being caught and choose not to drink. In reality, of course, this rarely happens.

The reason the OLCC has been so ineffective in stopping underage drinking is that drinking has become built into the college atmosphere. Even students who didn't drink much in high school come to college with the expectation of getting trashed at a party and students who did drink in high school expect to drink even more. In the minds of most college students, school is just as much about parties as it is classes. The thought of an MIP may not be appealing, but it is a risk most minors who drink are prepared to take. Even the unfortunate few who get nailed by the OLCC are not likely to change their whole lifestyle be-

cause of it. In fact, it is likely that within a week or less, that \$90 fine will be nothing more than a bad memory or a funny story to tell at a party.

The fact remains that those who choose not to drink choose not to for reasons of their own. Reasons that have nothing to do with the existence of the OLCC. And those who choose to drink will choose to no matter how much the OLCC tries to stop them. The bottom line is that it is pointless to spend tax dollars on a task force that runs around town in search of underage drinkers if the existence of such a task force has no effect on the problem it is designed to address. No matter how many fake IDs are swiped off the streets, no matter how many MIPs are dished out, minors will continue to find ways to obtain alcohol. If underage drinking is a problem, the OLCC is a poor solution.

If underage drinking is going to stop, it will be because young people choose for themselves not to drink. Those who have chosen to drink while underage have made their choice. Spending a lot of money trying to catch them and punish them will simply not help the problem. If Oregonians really want to see a decrease in the rate of minors who drink, the best solution is to sufficiently provide them with the facts on drinking so that they can make intelligent choices on their own. The money being spent on the OLCC today would be better used providing those people who choose to abstain from alcohol with inexpensive alternatives to drinking.

Creating and promoting alcohol-free dance and music clubs would be a better use of time and energy in the battle against underage drinking than busting a bunch of freshmen sitting around a keg. Building up a night scene that is not completely centered on alcohol could allow many young people to more easily choose sobriety. Sure, these steps won't come close to eliminating underage drinking, but they will do more to help than the OLCC ever will.

Brian Diamond, is a columnist for the Emerald. His views do not necessarily reflect those of the newspaper.

LETTERS

Bar is gay and friendly

I would like to point out a major discrepancy in your *Back To The Books* issue of the *Emerald* (Sept. 23).

I am specifically referring to Angie Suchy's article *Yes, Eugene has night life* (pg.1, Rhythm & Reviews). In her article, Angie lists Perry's as a gay-friendly nightclub. Angie obviously needs to retake J101 to learn to correct word choices.

Perry's is not a gay-friendly bar. Perry's is a gay bar. Period. It is a gay bar that is hetero-friendly. We will tolerate heterosexuals coming to our club to dance and drink because we are nice. That is our nature. But Angie's blatant heterosexism needs to be corrected.

I understand that "straight" bars are not as much fun to go to because 1) straight people can't dance, 2) they don't play decent music and 3) they don't make decent drinks. Stop me if this is starting to sound like a stereotype. Someone needed to point out that while Perry's is fun, it is wrong to assume it is a straight club.

I am more than sure this letter will be printed as a tiny, miniscule "correction" and not as a full-fledged letter to the editor because your paper is generally fairly conservative. If it ever did get printed, I'd be surprised.

Sean Michaels
 Journalism

Oregon Daily Emerald

P.O. BOX 3159, EUGENE, OREGON 97403

The Oregon Daily Emerald is published daily Monday through Friday during the school year and Tuesday and Thursday during the summer by the Oregon Daily Emerald Publishing Co., Inc., at the University of Oregon, Eugene, Oregon. A member of the Associated Press, the Emerald operates independently of the University with offices at Suite 300 of the Erb Memorial Union.

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EDITORIAL



Police: Go west young men

■ OUR OPINION: After recent arrests, the city is moving, not eliminating, a difficult problem

With one giant sweep of the West University district last week, the Eugene police department sent a message to all potential drug dealers, trespassers and disorderlies: We're watching.

And taking action. Well, as long as everything is just right. Like when the city's Rapid Deployment Force can get together. And when there's the jail space. And when nobody outside the department knows about it.

The sweeps, no doubt effective in and of themselves (90 arrests last week), just don't happen often enough to fight and ultimately eliminate the bigger problem of widespread drug use, harassment of pedestrians and just general mayhem in the area.

They make everybody happy — for a while. The streets are cleaned up. Dealers cower in fear of more impending random arrests. Panhandlers ask for small change instead of small bills. And anybody who knows police may suspect them of something (a large group) generally lie low.

But then slowly, cautiously, they creep back out again. To peddle their goods. To ask for our goods. To once again become enough of a problem for store owners and residents to complain.

And then, to the cheers of locals, the calvary returns to round up the evil-doers, take them to jail and then ride off on horseback (OK, in Chevy Caprices) into the sunset.

It's become a continuous cycle. And one that shows no signs of ending.

The cycle isn't total meaningless. Things are improving — slowly. The small time criminals are pretty wary. But a more accurate assessment would be things are *moving*.

Cars are pulling up to street corners

and picking up orders on High and Pearl Streets instead of Ferry and Patterson Streets. Panhandlers and friends have shifted from Little's Market to the more distant oasis of Circle K and beyond. The problem is moving west. But not out of the city.

Drugs, general waste and relaxation are virtues too synonymous with Eugene to leave so quickly. It's no coincidence that if questioned, dealers and career panhandlers all along the West Coast will cite Eugene as one of the places "to be." Only the drug-nest and general fun factory of the Haight-Ashbury district in San Francisco ranks higher in the "comfortability" scale.

We are a city and a population that is welcoming to all kinds of people — including criminals. This is the label and reputation the Eugene police department is up against. And it may not be a fight it can win.

Even the police themselves admit they have a complicated problem to solve. Sgt. Dave Poppe told the *Emerald* last weekend he thinks "it's optimistic to say we can eliminate the problem [in the West University district]. It's more pragmatic to say we're going to displace it."

Let's face it. We can't be dreamers in cleaning up this city. Practicality will do us much better.

Keep up the police sweeps. They aren't doing any harm besides getting people's hopes up. And let us continue all the other movements to clean up the West University area — including wider and more restrictions on 13th Avenue. But let's not forget the magnitude and history of the problem before us — because only with patience and a whole lot of persistence will we ever have any hope of solving it.

This editorial represents the opinions of the Emerald editorial board.