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# PERSPECTIVES

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## Old enough to vote, old enough to choose

Recent legislation demeans underage students by allowing universities to notify their parents when they are caught with alcohol

**Y**ou are caught with alcohol, you are a minor and it is not the first time. A school official drags you into an office to discuss the problem. Exasperated at your behavior the official warns, "I am sorry but we have to take action. I am going to call your parents." ...

You are: A. back in high school, B. having a bad dream or C. an adult attending a university somewhere in America. Yes, boys and girls, the correct answer is C.

**Opinion**



Stefanie Knowlton

President Clinton recently signed a higher education amendment that allows universities to notify parents of their child's drinking habits.

The last time I checked, students on average are 18 years or older when they enter college, which would, according to the law, make them adults capable of voting, going to war, making their own decisions and suffering the consequences.

What place does parental notification have in this legal definition of adult? None.

Apparently, universities, parents, Congress and the president believe students cannot function properly at college without parental supervision.

Where is the interference going to end? Are we going to get parent chaperons at every university-sponsored event too?

Ridiculous as this amendment may sound, it has good intentions. Prompted by recent alcohol-related deaths on university campuses, the parental notification clause was designed to decrease underage drinking and presumably deaths



or injuries associated with it.

In addition to infringing on a student's right to privacy, the new law may also be more dangerous to students' health than it is helpful.

Because the university's jurisdiction is limited to the campus itself, only the dorms, fraternities, sororities and those

caught on campus with alcohol will be subject to the new law. Instead of choosing not to drink, many students may decide to drink off campus, which could increase the number of those who drive under the influence.

According to a Harvard University study, the greatest risk with alcohol-relat-

ed behavior is to students driving under the influence.

In fact, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration states that 2,209 young adults ages 15 to 20 died in alcohol-related automobile accidents in 1997.

These figures far outweigh the handful of campus-related deaths because of underage binge drinking.

Elaine Green, associate dean of student life, explains that the University is going to be cautious when deciding what to do with the new legislation.

Other universities may not be as insightful.

We need to focus on real solutions and not revert to treating students like children. Students are going to drink. How safe students are when they drink should be our main concern. Are they driving? How much are they drinking?

Instead of calling parents we should make repeat offenders get involved in alcohol counseling. And this should apply to all students, not just those who are underage.

It is impossible to get students to make mature decisions about drinking habits when the universities are treating them like children.

Any way you look at the new amendment, it is a bad idea for students, the community and the university system.

... The official proceeds to dial your parent's telephone number. Someone picks up. It's your mom!

"I am sorry to inform you that your son was caught drinking on campus," the official says.

The response?

"He is 20 years old and perfectly capable of making his own decisions."

Stefanie Knowlton is a columnist for the Emerald. Her views do not necessarily represent those of the newspaper. She can be reached at sknowlto@gladstone.uoregon.edu.

