

New alcohol prevention class clears MIP fines

Students who have been cited for MIPs can now clean up their acts as well as their records in BUSTED I.

By Emily Gust
Oregon Daily Emerald

It's Friday night. A group of friends are doing what a lot of college students do when this night rolls around: partying. The underage revelers are consuming alcohol, but then suddenly everyone falls silent and all eyes turn toward the door. As someone receives a minor in possession citation, her buddies realize that despite their attempts to avoid such a situation, they've been BUSTED.

Starting today, the University's Substance Abuse and Prevention Program, in conjunction with the Eugene Municipal Court and the Eugene Police Department, is putting a whole new twist to that word: BUSTED now stands for Beginning Underage Success Through Educational Diversion — and a chance for minors caught with a heady brew to earn college credit.

BUSTED I is a one-credit class with the goals of prevention and education of alcohol-related issues. For 18- to 20-year-olds, it's a new chance to avoid paying hefty fines for their MIPs or citations for unlawful alcohol consumption on private premises or for furnishing liquor to minors.

"We actually never tell folks that they shouldn't drink. We advocate how to do that in the safest way possible. The emphasis of the course is choices," said Miki Mace, administrator for SAPP. "It's a course that essentially talks about health and safety issues and risk reduction."

Now in its pilot year, the diversion program allows first-time offenders to trade the traditional fine for an educational experience, but

only if they have not already taken the University's Drinking Decisions course, a class similar to BUSTED.

Those cited may plead guilty to the charge, attend BUSTED I — a 10-hour class at the University — and pay court costs of \$50, as well as a University fee of \$35.

If offenders successfully complete the course and refrain from alcohol-related offenses during the following four months, fines and assessments for the relevant violation will be suspended, the case will be dismissed and their records will show no evidence of a conviction, said Char Mauch, Eugene Municipal Court Supervisor. Participants also have the option of earning credit for their time in BUSTED I. They will, however, need to complete additional tasks in the course, such as keeping a journal, research papers,

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projects, observation papers or all of the above.

The diversion program is not only for University students who have received citations. It is an option available to all 18- to 20-year-olds in Eugene who have been charged.

Fines and assessments for an MIP range from a minimum of \$175 to a maximum of \$309, Mauch said. If an offender opts for the diversion program, he or she would most likely end up paying \$85 for court and University fees.

The program stems from a three-fold increase in the MIP caseload between 1997 and 1999. In 1997, the Eugene Municipal Court received 505 cases; in 1999, the number jumped to 1510, Mauch said.

"What we noticed is that some of the same people were being cited," Mace said. "So it became apparent that fines don't necessarily work."

Last November, EPD Officer Julie Smith suggested that the court and SAPP work together in developing an educational program for underage alcohol-related offenses. Similar educational programs exist for driving under the influence and theft, Mauch said.

"I think that it's a good option," junior psychology major Emily Garten said. "What can it hurt? And also, spending time in a class, you'll learn more than just by giving money."

Learning is exactly the aim of the course, which works on raising awareness rather than punishing for past offenses.

"The real goal is to reduce risk to the person," Mace said. "We talk about biological, sociological, psychological and physical risks surrounding alcohol use and abuse. We like for people to understand the difference — because there is a difference — between use and abuse."

She added that organizers also want people to know the long-term effects of alcohol on the body.

"We like them to know about craving and addiction. We like them to know how to keep themselves safe if they choose to drink," she said.

Drinking Decisions, developed in 1996, will continue to be offered even as BUSTED I begins.

"Our experience with Drinking Decisions is students report drinking fewer drinks at one sitting," Mace said. "They also report they're

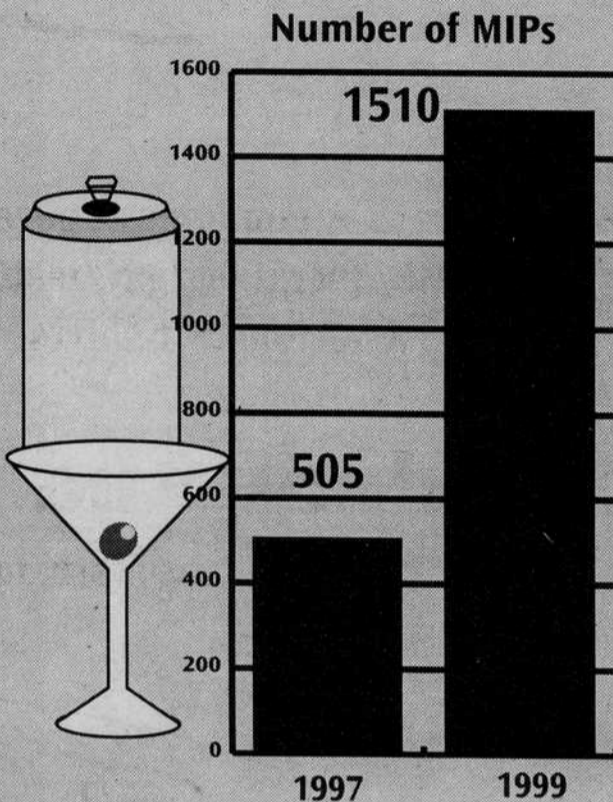
more aware of health and safety issues."

For repeat offenders, there will be the option of taking a second class, BUSTED II. While specifics are still

being worked out, it seems the course will be twice the number of hours, and only a portion of the fines will be suspended if the program is completed successfully.


MIP Diversion Program

The new Minor In Possession Diversion Program allows students to take a one-credit class in lieu of paying the fine for an MIP. The program was created in response to the increased MIP caseload in the past three years.



SOURCE: Eugene Municipal Court & UO Registrar Office

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