

WSU eyes pulling freshmen from frats

Proposal surfaces during Board of Regents meeting as a means to combat underage drinking on campus

William L. Spence/Lewiston Tribune

PULLMAN - A proposal to prohibit freshmen from living in fraternities would effectively "gut" the Greek system, a Washington State University regent said Thursday.

Ted Baselar commended university officials for their efforts to reduce binge drinking and underage drinking by students, but said keeping freshmen from living in fraternities wasn't the solution.

Students who belong to fraternities and sororities aren't admitted to the hospital for alcohol abuse in greater proportion to other university students, Baselar said. Moreover, Greek alumni are some of the university's strongest supporters, giving money and taking on leadership roles at a higher rate than other graduates.

And since freshmen make up more than 40 percent of the 3,600 or so Greek students at WSU, he said, "it's pretty clear you'd gut the Greek system" if freshmen were prohibited from living in fraternities.

The Board of Regents will debate this issue in greater detail during a panel discussion with Greek students and university officials this morning. That meeting begins at 8 a.m. in Compton Union Building room 204.

Thursday's discussion took place during a presentation from the alcohol and drug task force, which was created last fall following the alcohol poisoning death of 18-year-old freshman Kenny Hummel.

Bruce Wright, the task force chairman and executive director of WSU's Health and Wellness Services, said there doesn't appear to be more binge drinking at the university now than in the past, but it is increasing in severity.

While a 0.08 blood alcohol content is the legal limit for driving, he said, "we're seeing an increase in students who present at the hospital with 0.3 BAC and over - sometimes 0.4 and a couple 0.5. That's alarming."

Freshmen are particularly prone to injuries related to excessive drinking, and freshmen who live in fraternities are even more at risk.

"They are the highest risk in the highest risk category," Wright said.

Dean of Students Melynda Huskey noted that WSU's Greek students contribute 40 percent of all community service volunteer hours by students and, for the first time in recent memory, maintain a higher overall grade-point average than the university average.

However, she also noted that, whereas only eight freshmen women are living in sororities this year, a number of fraternities are dominated by freshmen and sophomore men.

Gradually phasing out fraternities as a housing option for freshmen should give them time to attract more upperclassmen and avoid increased vacancy rates, Huskey said.

The board also received an update Thursday regarding the 4 percent employee salary increase that was authorized by President Elson Floyd. Chief Budget Officer Joan King said the "vast majority" of faculty and staff should qualify for the across-the-board increase.

"Eligibility will be determined on Sept. 15," she said. "We'll take a snapshot of who's eligible and who's not. The effective date of the increase is Jan. 1."

The total cost of the increase is about \$16 million, King said, which includes \$11 million in state funding and another \$5 million in grant and contract funding.

About a third of the faculty members could also be eligible for \$2 million in merit adjustments, she said.

It's been five years since WSU employees have had a regular salary increase.

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