

Behaving badly at WSU? It'll cost you

Officials now assessing fines to rule breakers

By Katie Roenigk Daily News staff writer Moscow-Pullman Daily News

Whether they are caught drinking underage, damaging property or trespassing on campus, Washington State University students should expect to be charged a fine this year if they have violated any of the school's standards of conduct.

In the past, only students who broke a rule involving drugs or alcohol lost money in the process: They were required to pay \$75 for counseling and \$20 for educational materials as part of their rehabilitation, while other rule-breakers did not incur any financial penalties.

Bernadette Buchanan, director of the Office of Student Standards and Accountability, said that system did not seem equitable.

"Should someone stealing lap tops get less of a sanction than someone who had a beer cup in their hand?" Buchanan said this week. "Let's be fair."

Now, as part of a pilot project initiated through Buchanan's office, any student found to be in violation of the code will be asked to pay a \$100 fine, with an additional \$150 fine assessed to those who fail to pay by the established due date.

More money

The change should bring extra revenue to OSSA, with fines projected to help the department net \$10,000-\$13,000 annually.

Previously, Buchanan said, it cost WSU money to operate OSSA - an office that only serves 5 percent of students.

"The other 95 percent shouldn't have to pay for what happens with the 5 percent (who violate the code)," Buchanan said.

Now, she continued, OSSA will be able to return its funding to the university instead of asking for more every year. She hoped the extra money would go toward improvements elsewhere on campus, or help save a department that is struggling financially.

"If we can be innovative right now, why shouldn't we be?" Buchanan asked.

WSU is facing a \$20 million annual deficit from the state, with more budget cuts anticipated this year.

Spread awareness

Most students may not even realize that fines are being assessed, said Riley Myklebust, president of the Associated Students of WSU. In fact, although he had been told about the concept earlier this year, on Tuesday Myklebust said even he was not aware that the pilot project had been initiated.

"I didn't know they were going to release it," he said. "I was surprised it was released, and I hadn't heard about it."

He said ASWSU would do its best to inform students about the new system so they can have a voice in the matter, and Buchanan's office is planning some outreach as well. She suggested organizing residence hall contests to test students' knowledge about specific standards of conduct at WSU.

"Our goal is for people not to violate," Buchanan said. "We don't want people to have a record when they leave here."

Once students know about the added financial consequence, Myklebust said they most likely will think twice before violating university rules.

"Students will realize it's an automatic \$100, so I'd assume that it would be a deterrent," Myklebust said.

On a broader scope, he said he appreciates Buchanan's efforts to help WSU function through "tough financial times."

"Whether it's the right decision or not, it's nice everyone is working as hard as they can to make sure we succeed financially," Myklebust said.

Vetted

The plan to charge students for code violations was approved by WSU's Fee Committee and reviewed throughout the university according to Buchanan.

"It's gone all the way up to the president's office," she said.

She added that some fees, like those students pay to take a class, must be approved by the state. But when it comes to fees for violations through OSSA the decision can be made internally. Buchanan said WSU officials will assess the program at the end of the year to determine whether it should stay in place.

"We might find that it's not a good idea," Buchanan said. "It might be a big bust. But I have a feeling it's not going to be."

The program also will be considered by the Board of Regents on Nov. 17-18. The board will decide whether OSSA fines should be added to the Washington Administrative Code.

"Fining people is in the library code and the parking code," Buchanan said. "We want it to be consistent all the way around."

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