

# Miami drinkers will be helped

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OXFORD — Miami University has instituted a Good Samaritan policy this semester that allows heavily intoxicated students and their friends to call for help without fear of police charges being filed against them.

It's being tested this fall, but university officials expect it to continue, although the provisions of the new rule may be altered after study at the end of the semester.

Good Samaritan policy will provide assistance without arrest threat.

"We are still trying to work it out. There will be a report to the dean of students," said Susan Vaughn, director of Ethics and Student Conflict Resolution. "It's all part of a much greater strategy. When they are early in their careers, we hope they will learn from their mistakes. We want to look at where they are drinking and what they are drinking."

The policy provides that a student can call for help if he or she has been drinking heavily and feels there is a health risk. It applies only to

## Rule has been used this year

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on-campus incidents and is a one-time-only break, Vaughn explained. It is not a free pass, either, as it only involves an exemption from legal troubles. Other university requirements still apply for students found intoxicated.

The exemption also applies to the student's friends who may have been drinking. Police will respond along with medical personnel, but officers will only monitor the scene and not file charges against those involved.

"We know students

who have been drinking excessively or dangerously are afraid to call for help because they'll get into trouble," Vaughn said, adding the university's goal is to ensure the safety of students.

The roots of the program go back several years, Vaughn said, to a proposal by Associated Student Government. The Office of Student Affairs looked at it and the idea moved to this semester's Good Samaritan rule.

Other universities have instituted similar programs and Vaughn said she has had parents of incoming freshmen ask about it at Miami during the summer prior to school opening.

While no police charges will be filed, students must still attend a four-hour remedial class and a one-on-one visit with a university counselor for a risk assessment. If there

are no more violations for a year, the student avoids the "Strike One," which can lead to dismissal from the university on a second offense.

Intoxicated students must also cooperate with police and medical authorities after such a call — being belligerent or uncooperative will result in full legal action and possible citations.

"If they are cooperative, they will be treated medically and called in to my office the next day to meet and we explain the exemption," she said. "It's not a freebie. We want to get help for bad decisions."

As of last Thursday, Vaughn said, the Good Samaritan rule had been used 10 times since the first week of classes.

"We had no idea what to expect," she said, adding they want students to

use the rule to avoid medical problems and are trying to get information out to explain the program to prevent serious medical issues from drinking. "We just don't want anyone to die here."

Vaughn said the rule does not apply to students "drinking off the campus, but Oxford Police Sgt. Jon Varley said the department has had a similar program in effect for two years.

"We've done that for the past couple of years when Miami students are highly intoxicated and probably need to go to the hospital," Varley said. "They can call for an ambulance and get help without getting into trouble."

Varley said police officers are the first responders and will take care of the student until the Life Squad arrives.

"Officers always respond. We're the first responders and arrive ahead of the Life Squad. Once the ambulance gets there, there is no more police action," he said. Like the new university policy, though, Varley said, students making calls for help must be cooperative when that help arrives.

"We've had them taking swings at medical personnel or spit at them," Varley said. "At that point, there are probably going to be charges filed."

Vaughn said Butler County Prosecutor Michael Gmoser has asked the Oxford and Miami police departments to send a letter home to students' parents when they are charged with alcohol violations. Oxford has been sending them out in the past, and Miami started doing that this year.

"We are looking at a letter to parents. I think the policy will say we want parent involvement. It is still being developed. In January, we will have it worked out," she said.

The Good Samaritan rule is written to protect the person in distress, as well as a friend who helps, and both are exempt from police citations.

"There are a lot of nuances," Vaughn said.

She explained that a student coming across another student passed out on the campus and calling for help, does not qualify under the Good Samaritan rules. A resident adviser finding a student passed out in the residence hall does not qualify, either.

"It's a lot different from what was done before," she said. "It is kind of a trial in the fall semester."