

Abuse policy grows in use

By Joanne Huist Smith
Staff Writer

Good Samaritan policies granting amnesty to students who call 911 to assist a classmate at risk of an overdose or alcohol abuse, even though they are high themselves and in violation of school rules, are growing in popularity.

"We take all alcohol and drug violations seriously," Cilla Shindel, UD's director of media relations, said. "The intent is to get students to call anytime another student is in need of help."

Policies range from protection for just the caller, to immunity for caller and victim. Some strictly relate to alcohol offenses, others also include drugs.

UD instituted its policy 20 years ago. Miami University launched a Good Samaritan policy this year as a pilot project. Xavier University and Antioch College also have them in place. Wright State University's amnesty policy is limited to students violating the school's alcohol code of conduct in cases where they are reporting an act of sexual misconduct. The university is considering expansion of the policy.

"I think it's a great idea to have something in place to increase reporting any time a student's life is in jeopardy, but there's got to be some balance if you're trying to help a student learn and grow," said Gary Dickstein, Wright State's assistant vice president of student affairs/director of community standards and student conduct. "You can promise no separation from student housing, no separation from the university, but anything short of that is fair game."

Students for Sensible Drug Policy – an international grassroots network of students who are concerned about the impact of drug abuse – reports 240 colleges and universities have some form of the policy to hold students harmless from school discipline or sanctions.

UD's Mitigating Circumstances Policy gives amnesty to students who may be breaking the school's alcohol policy, who call for emergency help for another student.

"This falls under our alcohol policy, but it applies to any circumstances where a student's life is in danger. It could be drugs. It could be alcohol,"

Shindel said.

Members of UD's Student Government Association fear students aren't as familiar with the policy as they should be or if they are familiar with the policy, they don't know

the specifics, said Megan Abbate, a senior at UD and student body president.

"Some of our senators feel we should do more to inform students about the policy," Abbate said.

UD student government members are surveying classmates to learn their level of knowledge about the policy. The organization is considering a public awareness campaign, Abbate said.

While the UD policy protects students from school discipline – written warning, probation,

suspension or expulsion – it doesn't exempt them from criminal charges. If Dayton police respond to a call, and they feel charges are warranted, they will be filed, Shindel said.

Miami instituted a Good Samaritan policy as a pilot project for 2013-14 school year that allows a student to call for medical assistance for a fellow student who is intoxicated without fear of discipline. The student in need of medical assistance would be treated and may also avoid disciplinary action by the school.

Although no citation would appear on their permanent student record, educational interventions may be required of the student, such as meeting with a counselor or attending an alcohol education class, Claire Wagner, Miami University's director of news and communication said.

Oxford police have traditionally treated the incidents as medical, not criminal issues, Wagner said.