



Southern Connecticut  
State University

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VICE PRESIDENT FOR STUDENT AND UNIVERSITY AFFAIRS

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Dear Parents/Families of Residential Students:

We have just recently enjoyed a memorable combined Parent/Family Day and Homecoming Weekend, passed the mid-term period, and are headed toward Thanksgiving Break, which will be followed shortly thereafter by the end of the Fall 2010 semester! I hope it has been an exciting time for your student and that amidst the normal challenges and disappointments; he/she is experiencing a truly engaging and supportive faculty and staff and finding lots of success.

I am writing to you now about one aspect of social life for students at Southern, an area of increasing concern, and to seek your assistance. I am referring to the high-risk use of alcohol, the increasing role it plays in some student's lives, the marketing and promotional practices which lead thousands from SCSU and other colleges and from nearby cities and towns into the streets of downtown New Haven late into the night and early morning hours, and the potential effect all this has on the university community and your son/daughter into the future. It is my hope that you will engage your son or daughter in discussion about how he/she has been avoiding being "caught up" in this, and the ways in which positive, healthy choices can be made in their lives.

I have recently written to all residential students (a copy of my letter to students can be found at <http://www.southernct.edu/admissions/parentsfamilies/safetyletter/> urging them to think about their health and safety in all of their choices. We have found that the use of drugs and alcohol at college is not much different than when they were in high school. The first use of substances typically begins much earlier than the collegiate years, but the frequency and intensity during college sometimes increases. We see this, in spite of our vigorous efforts in alcohol and drug use prevention and education programs. We have reminded our students of what they already know, of what you and others have taught them about the destructive effects of high-risk use of alcohol: alcohol poisoning leading to permanent physiological damage; lowered academic performance; strained friendships and fractured family relationships; higher rates of vandalism; the potential for criminal behaviors involving weapons, physical violence and sexual assault; and most sadly, death. In short, we know that high-risk alcohol use poses a serious threat to your children and our students and to the well-being of the communities within which they live. Yet, even as they know all of these facts, they encounter great social pressure and they don't always behave in a way which reflects what they actually know.

I want you to know that one of the health and safety-oriented policy changes we made at the beginning of the year to address this -- tougher enforcement through the issuance of infraction citations for alcohol consumption by any underage individual -- seems to be having a modest positive effect. The number of students who have required a medical transport by ambulance from the campus for detoxification is about half of what it was last year at this time; that's good. But the informal reports coming from student and professional staff, from the City of New Haven, and University Police, set the stage for a different story, a less positive story.

While Thursday has been the "traditional" College Night for most New Haven downtown clubs, we are seeing increased marketing for Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday and Saturday nights, as well. "Pre-gaming" before going-out or a night of social fun is common. Advisable limits on amounts of alcohol to consume are frequently surpassed even before entering the downtown bar. Underage consumption is frequent. Pre-purchased identification wrist-bands, without age verification, are sold by our students who are employed by local establishments and promoters. They are sold selectively and at lower prices to underage women and rarely sold to underage men. Heavily marketed in sexist ways to women, the stage is set: the men will

come and will pay whatever the price the establishment sets. Downtown establishments become seriously overcrowded and fire code occupancy limits are regularly surpassed, which is a recipe for unthinkable disaster – the loss of talented young people’s lives, Southern student’s lives.

When more than 10,000 individuals – in varying stages of intoxication -- begin to fill Chapel, Crown, Church and Temple Streets after closing hours at 2:00 a.m., the risks to personal safety escalate. The highly-publicized instances this fall which involved muggings and robberies, physical assault, arrests, and two murders provide more than enough evidence: partying in downtown New Haven in the early morning hours is extremely dangerous.

The New Haven Police, acting in consort with all other enforcement units including the Liquor Control Commission, the City Health and Fire Departments are working on all fronts to vigorously enforce applicable laws, but the magnitude of the crowds on Thursday-Saturday nights seems almost overwhelming. Stretched to their limits and relying on overtime officers, citations have been issued, raids conducted, arrests made. When these are imposed on students, they become serious and costly distractions from their academic work and personal responsibilities, and they pose long-term potential consequences for some of their desired careers, particularly in professional fields which require background checks for certification and/or licensure, or entry into graduate school.

The expectation that New Haven Police will be able to protect bar-goers in this environment is unrealistic. We have advised that students themselves accept some of the responsibility for their own safety: If they go downtown at all, we advise: consume alcohol only if of legal age of 21, travel and stay with friends, consider eliminating or limiting pre-gaming, monitor intake per hour based on age and weight and other factors affecting low-risk alcohol use, never let a friend out of sight, put a “pause” on drinking during the evening-- there is no reason to “keep up” with everyone, consider not being in the bars/clubs for “last call”, plan to return to the campus early, by 1:00 a.m. with your friends, avoid the mob scene in the street, use RIDES--it was created to provide safe transportation home.

The university has renewed its commitment to doing everything possible to help ensure the continued safety and well-being of our students. Surveys show that most of our Southern students are not engaging in risky behaviors concerning alcohol and many are taking advantage of the social opportunities now available through campus organizations. I hope that as you initiate conversations with your son or daughter about these concerns, you will encourage them to consider alternative weekend activities. They might participate in any of the activities of over 100 student clubs and organizations, contribute to our community by engaging in community service projects, attend athletic competitions or hooked on intramurals and club sports. They should avoid excessive alcohol consumption and if they are under 21, avoid drinking altogether. As always they can support their friends and/or seek confidential help themselves from university resources such as the Counseling Center, ([www.southernct.edu/services/counseling](http://www.southernct.edu/services/counseling)) at B 219 Engleman Hall, 203-392- 5475, or from our Drug and Alcohol Resource ([www.southernct.edu/drugalcoholresource/](http://www.southernct.edu/drugalcoholresource/)) at Room 1, Schwartz Hall, 203-392-5087.

Here at Southern, we want to do everything possible to encourage healthy student life styles and academic success. With your help – with your active initiation of conversations with your student in the near future about these and other issues facing him/her at college – we will continue to do our very best to ensure that all of our students can realize their hopes and dreams in a safe, positive, and healthy campus environment.

Sincerely,



Ronald D. Herron, Ed.D.

Vice President for Student and University Affairs