

Special Report

A Booze Accounting

USM Alcohol Problems Increase During Saunders' First Year

Data released recently by the USM Police Department (USMPD) indicates that the number of liquor law violations on the USM campus increased dramatically during 2007, USM President Martha Saunders' first year at the helm. According to Erica Sherrill Owens' story for *The Student Printz* entitled "Alcohol related arrests increase," the USMPD reported 176 liquor law violations in 2007, compared to just 75 in 2006, representing an increase of 135% over that time period.

Alcohol related arrests increase

Erica Sherrill Owens
News Editor

The University Police Department recently reported an increase in the number of alcohol-related arrests and violations. UPD reported 176 liquor law violations in 2007 compared to 75 in 2006, and the department reported a 2007 increase of 85 driving under the influence violations, compared to 15 in 2006.

Linda Parish, UPD investigator and interim major of operations, said the increased numbers are a combination of more violations and stricter enforcement.

"We're enforcing the alcohol violations very seriously here, any alcohol violation," Parish said. However, the charges are not all student-related, said Parish. "A lot of people cut across campus and travel Fourth Street, which we cover," Parish said. UPD has a larger number of alcohol-related violations during the fall semester, Parish said. "In the spring we have less, and the summer there are very few," Parish said. "Sometimes it takes students a semester to realize that we are an alcohol-free campus." The violation of and battle to enforce the university's liquor policy is not lost on some students. Ruth Poe, a freshman history and psychology major from Vicksburg, said she feels the enforcement of the alcohol policy is almost a losing battle. "I know if anybody has liquor in the dorms then they are not making a big deal out of it," said Melissa Dunne, a freshman dance major from Birmingham, Ala. However, both students said they feel safer with the presence of UPD on campus. "I'm glad they are there though," Dunne said. "I see them as a giant safety patrol." Poe said she agreed, and she felt more comfortable walking around on campus. "Also, when something bad happens they are there," Poe said. UPD also reported an increase in citations for disturbances. Parish said the majority of those arrests and citations are related to violations of the university noise policy. Parish said a major problem that UPD is faced with is larceny, both petit and grand.

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Sebe Dale IV / Photo Editor Officer Kerry Woodard

More importantly, USMPD figures reported in Owens' report indicated that campus-wide DUI citations increased from 15 in 2006 to 85 in 2007. These totals represent a 467% increase for the year. According to one USM freshman interviewed by Owens, the USMPD seems to be fighting "a losing battle," and given all of the liquor possessed in the dorms it seems as though the University is "not making a big deal out of [alcohol on campus]."

It is not known at this time whether USM is actually experiencing a return to the "party school" reputation it once held, perhaps even during Saunders' own time as a USM student decades ago. What is known is that the recently released USMPD data indicate that such a return to glory is not beyond the realm of possibility.