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UMass Amherst to ban dorm guests, hold viewing parties to prevent Super Bowl riots

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Dozens of arrests were made amid violence on Saint Patrick's Day.

By Matt Rocheleau

GLOBE CORRESPONDENT JANUARY 29, 2015

UMass Amherst will ban students who live on campus from hosting guests during the Super Bowl on Sunday, in an effort to prevent rowdy celebrations that have plagued the college during previous championships featuring local teams.

Administrators said the restrictions, coupled with other measures that include school-sanctioned viewing parties, are based on advice in a report in September that recommended ways the college can improve how it handles large-scale disturbances.



“What we’re emphasizing to the campus as a whole is, don’t get caught up in a crowd and in a situation in which things can go

bad and in which unintended consequences can occur for you,” university spokesman Ed Blaguszewski said Wednesday. “Despite chatter on social media and speculation, the vast majority of UMass students don’t get involved in this activity, don’t cause any difficulty, and, if they are interested in football, watch the game and celebrate in good fashion.”



From Friday until noon on Sunday, each student can host up to four guests in his or her dormitory, but only two can be from outside the campus community. From noon on Sunday until noon Monday, only students who live in the residence halls will be allowed in the buildings, officials said.

Viewing parties and other Super Bowl-related programming will be held at some 40 sites across campus, including in residence and dining halls. The goal is to prevent large crowds from gathering, particularly in the Southwest residential area, where riots have broken out in the past.

Blaguszewski said security will be tightened at guest sign-in desks in dormitories and police presence will be stepped up during and after the game.

He said the university will use social media before the game to send guest policy reminders and to promote school-sanctioned activities. The school may use social media during and after the game to direct students as needed.

The moves reflect changes recommended in the fall report by former Boston police commissioner Edward F. Davis.

The report reviewed the most recent unruly gathering, in March. That event, called the Blarney Blowout, an off-campus celebration of St. Patrick’s Day, led to dozens of arrests and violent clashes with police.

Davis, who provides security consulting services for the Boston Globe and other corporate clients, said in the report that UMass, campus and town police, and students were all to blame for the poor manner in which the situation unfolded. A particular problem was the large number of guests who visited students that weekend.

Of the 58 arrested, only 21 were UMass Amherst students.

After a series of sports championship celebrations spun out of control in Boston during the early 2000s, city officials, under Davis’s leadership, have had success in managing large gatherings. Problems, however, have persisted at UMass Amherst. A riot broke out and 14 people were arrested after the Patriots’ last Super Bowl appearance, a loss in 2012.

Some students criticized the temporary guest restrictions.

Zac Bears, the opinion editor at The Massachusetts Daily Collegian, wrote in the newspaper that the plan “will fail to prevent post-game chaos.”

“A more Draconian residence hall policy will only agitate students involved, now looking not only for a little fun but also to show displeasure at administrative decisions to limit students’ power and rights,” Bears wrote.

Blaguszewski said the restrictions are intended to ensure safety, not to squash fun.

“We think it’s great that people are going to watch,” he said. But, “There’s a distinction between enjoying yourself and having a good time and rioting.”

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