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Umass Amherst warned on rowdy behavior

By **Matt Rocheleau** | GLOBE STAFF MARCH 05, 2014

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The University of Massachusetts Amherst is taking steps to crack down on rowdy behavior at an annual pre-Saint Patrick's Day bash planned for this weekend. Several students were hospitalized last year and six were arrested after drunk revelers set fires, smashed windows, and hurled bottles during an off-campus celebration that attracted thousands.

Campus officials said they have reached out to local police, landlords, parents, and college faculty and staff in attempt to rein in Saturday's Blarney Blowout.

“We are acutely aware of the strain that unruly off-campus behavior puts on the community, and we are taking decisive action to discourage gatherings such as the Blarney Blowout,” Enku Gelaye, interim vice chancellor for student affairs and campus life, said in a statement Monday. “While most of our students are respectful of their neighbors in the surrounding communities, those students who are not are being reminded of the seriousness with which the university takes these matters.”

The event, which the university said it does not sanction, is sponsored by bars in downtown Amherst. Typically, the celebration starts before noon as revelers visit the bars, which serve up food deals and giveaways. Many then journey to other parts of the town to meet with other partiers into the evening.

The event is usually held before Saint Patrick's Day, because students are on Spring Break.

Gelaye said campus and town police will step up their presence throughout Amherst this weekend and “will address any potentially threatening situations swiftly and definitively, up to and including arrest.” Gelaye said behavior on or off the campus that violates laws or the university's student code of conduct can lead to suspension or expulsion.



University officials are also taking steps to stop students and vendors from distributing promotional party T-shirts and other apparel featuring UMass images or logos, which they said violate trademark law.

Zac Broughton, president of the Student Government Association, praised the university for issuing warnings and taking preventive measures. He said bars that sponsor the event should be held more accountable for the impact the celebration has around town.

“Year after year, we hear that this is a UMass issue and it's UMass's fault, but I don't ever hear any residents or officials blaming the bars who are actually hosting this event and asking why the bars don't

do more to make it safer or create some type of alternative event," Broughton, a senior from Salem, said by phone Tuesday.

Problems have escalated in recent years, officials said. Two years ago, police reported finding a large number of intoxicated bargoers in the downtown area, which led to public urination, vomiting, fights, and other disturbances.

Last year's bash migrated to an outdoor party at a Meadow Street apartment complex that was attended by more than 2,000 people, authorities said. Two of those arrested allegedly assaulted officers, and property was destroyed before town, campus, and State Police dressed in full riot gear shut down the gathering.

After last year's mayhem, Stephanie O'Keeffe, chairwoman of the town Select Board, told the Globe the university should do more to "counter the perception of permissiveness about this kind of thing."

Campus spokesman Edward Blaguszewski said the event is "not anything we encourage, support, or sanction."

"We've said we don't think it's a good idea, and we've expressed our opinion about the wisdom of the event, but it's not something that's really in our authority or jurisdiction," said Blaguszewski.

"It's a decision private businesses make and they have the right to make."

Managers at several downtown Amherst bars either declined to comment or could not be reached Tuesday.

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