

The Dean's Almanac

What We Know, What We Say, What We Do

November 7, 2006

This is a slightly different kind of Almanac, because I want to get it out to you quickly. I understand that a number of you are wondering about our response to student behavior, specifically violations of the *Student Code* and criminal behavior. You may believe that we do not act quickly enough when a crime has been committed, or a student has engaged in activities not permitted on or off campus.



This can be a bit complex, but stay with me and I'll try and explain some things that might help make sense of recent events.

When things happen on campus, we (the Dean of Students office) typically know about it quickly. This is because other staff, most often the UConn Police or Residence Life, are on the scene and will communicate information to us as soon as possible. When our Police Department makes an arrest, the details of that arrest are sent to us within a day. At that point, our [Office of Community Standards](http://www.dos.uconn.edu/community_standards.html) (http://www.dos.uconn.edu/community_standards.html), usually its director, Cathy Cocks, determines the next step. In the event of serious misconduct or arrest, there is likely to be a hearing. There are multiple steps that must take place before that hearing can occur. These are outlined in the [Student Code](http://www.dos.uconn.edu/student_code.html) (http://www.dos.uconn.edu/student_code.html) and are there for the protection of both the accused student and any victims of this misconduct.

If we believe that a student should not be on campus prior to that hearing, which might be the case if the violation is extremely serious, we will do an interim suspension, during which the student is prohibited from being on campus until the date of the hearing. These are rare situations for an obvious reason: it may be a week or ten days before a hearing takes place. If the student has been banned from campus, including classes, during that time, and then is found not responsible, s/he has missed a significant amount of class time. But we *do* do them, like I said, when an extremely egregious (especially a violent) violation has allegedly occurred.

When things happen *off-campus*...well, this gets complicated. We rely on local law enforcement to share information with us. They are under no obligation to do so. Media outlets like the Hartford Courant have reporters whose job it is to monitor the paperwork passing between law enforcement, the State's Attorney's office, and courts of law. A reporter is very likely to see that an arrest has been made within a few hours of the police releasing that information to the State's Attorney. That reporter may then write a story that a newspaper runs the next day. And that, quite literally, may be the first time anyone at UConn knows about the arrest.

As soon as we know, we attempt to get the same information the reporter has gotten. We then begin the process of determining charges within our Office of Community Standards, as outlined above.

I hope that part's all clear. Now the part that may be more annoying to some of you: why don't we tell you what's going on? The major reason is the limitations placed on us by federal law. Student conduct records are considered educational records, which are protected by FERPA, the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act. Unless a student signs a release allowing the University to publicly discuss their conduct matter (which sometimes happens with athletes, because they are under such intense media scrutiny), we cannot share information about charges, hearing dates, hearing outcomes, sanctions, or anything else. Believe me, it is *incredibly* frustrating when a newspaper publishes information that we know is erroneous or incomplete and we cannot comment in any way, especially when our process or integrity is being publicly questioned. In the end, though, your right to privacy exceeds our desire to defend ourselves, and we keep quiet.

Most activity in a court of law is public. That information can be shared. But our process is not a criminal process. It's an educational one, and so, by definition, a confidential one.

Lastly, please know that the Daily Campus is an independent student newspaper. No administrator on this campus has any authority to tell the Daily Campus what to publish. They are students, too, just like you. Their work is challenging, and their deadlines always loom. I'm sure they would love the luxury of sitting around debating the merits of this paragraph or that quote, but then the paper wouldn't get published and you wouldn't get your morning fix of Stick Cat and the Instant Daily. I don't always agree with the editorial decisions of the Daily Campus, but I am firmly committed to their right to publish as they see fit. It is *your* student newspaper, your fees fund them, and if you have an issue with their content, you have ways to redress that issue.

I'm happy to respond to any questions you have, publicly or privately, on the above topics (or whatever else is on your collective mind). I know it's a lot to ask, but please try and trust that those of us who are responsible for your well-being, for responding to bad behavior, for keeping you safe, are doing our best to honor that trust.

I'll be back next week with questions from the mailbag. Thanks for reading. Take care.