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Students react to new law

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In response to impending changes in Connecticut's underage drinking law, residential college administrators said they are trying to balance student privacy and legal responsibility in modifying their party policies.

Students from several residential colleges said they have been told that parties that are unregistered or that move into "public spaces" within the colleges will be broken up more frequently than in the past in light of the Connecticut legislature's decision to toughen laws on underage drinking.

The amended law, which will take effect Oct. 1, makes it illegal for persons under the age of 21 to possess alcohol on private property and for adults to knowingly allow minors to consume alcohol on their property. But many students said they are not expecting the new legislation to have a significant impact on residential college social life.

Jonathan Edwards College Master Gary Haller said in an e-mail to students Monday that student safety remains the "first priority" of Yale College and that the administration will not intrude upon the privacy of students' suites. But Haller said some circumstances might warrant the breaking up of parties in his college, such as unregistered or overly large parties, excessive noise or property destruction, and underage drinking or partying in hallways, courtyards or other common spaces in the college.

"If anything brings your 'party actions' to my attention, then it will be interpreted as other than private and require action by myself, the associate master or dean," Haller said in the e-mail.

In an e-mail sent on Monday to sophomores, juniors and seniors in his college, Branford College Master Steven Smith identified the same list of possible situations as justifying party disruption.

Saybrook College Master Mary Miller said party registration will be a major focus for residential college administrators this year.

"I believe that the masters and deans are one in their desire to see that the Undergraduate Regulations are followed, especially by tracking numbers of students at parties and through their registration," she wrote in an e-mail to the News.

Miller said that because parties have always been closely monitored in Saybrook, the new attitude toward enforcement will not yield much change in her college.

In Pierson College, the new alcohol regulations have led to new restrictions on "Tuesday Night Club" get-togethers, a regular feature of the college's social life. The event - in prior years open to students from all years and colleges - is now limited to Pierson seniors.

Jerel Bryant '07, one of the organizers of TNC, said the first seniors-only TNC took place last night and there were no problems excluding underclassmen from the event. Freshmen, sophomores and juniors in Pierson were notified ahead of time that the event would not be open to them, he said.

"It's never been a senior-only event, and it's never been a Pierson senior-only event, and I think that's hard for us to recognize," Bryant said. "But I think that in a year or two when it becomes more of a trend and less of a novelty, people will be used to it."

Many students said they were not worried that the new rules will significantly affect the social scene on campus.

"Even if [the rules change], people will find a way around it," Meijin Bruttomesso '08 said. Will Kletter '10 said he thinks the new law puts freshman counselors in an especially difficult position.

"Our freshman counselors don't want to be policemen, they want to be counselors," he said.

Monica Cowan '09 said her master and dean discussed this issue with the sophomore class during registration Tuesday morning. She said that Smith stressed the registration of parties over policing, and that he plans to work with the Branford "God Quad" party suite to make sure the rules are being followed.

But Cowan said she has heard that what goes on inside student rooms will not be regulated.

"They said they weren't going to investigate our private spaces," Cowan said. "What we do in our rooms is like our own little vortex."

Cowan said she does not think the change is causing a major stir among students.

"I've heard people talk about the changes in Facebook infinitely more than this," she said.