

UNH Officials Promise Strong Action after Saturday's Melee

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DURHAM, N.H. – University of New Hampshire officials say they will take strong action against any students who were charged with felony offenses as a result of Saturday night's melee in downtown Durham.

“We will not tolerate the kind of behavior witnessed last Saturday night,” said UNH President Ann Weaver Hart. “We are very proud of the University of New Hampshire. Our students and community deserve better, and we will take strong action that will send a message to our students that there are serious consequences for unlawful behavior.”

“We are waiting for the Durham police to provide us with arrest reports, and as soon as we review those, we will announce actions we plan to take,” said Anne Lawing, senior assistant vice president for student affairs. She adds that the announcement likely will come within the next week.

UNH and town officials also are reviewing the total cost of Saturday's civil disturbance, including property damage and overtime pay for police units. According to Gregg Sanborn, executive assistant to the president, UNH has every intention of repaying the town for damages incurred. He added student leaders also are considering ways to help defray the costs.

“Students need to be held accountable,” he explained. “There needs to be consequences to this unlawful behavior.”

UNH and town officials believed they were prepared for the fallout from Saturday night's national championship hockey game. “Win or lose,” Lawing said, “we knew there would be student reactions that we would need to seriously deal with. However, we did not expect the degree of violence we witnessed.”

UNH and town officials began meeting in late February to discuss

planning and preparations for off-campus behavior in the spring, with an eye on possible playoff games. Discussions began to focus on how the town and university would respond to student reactions following Thursday's and Saturday's games.

The UNH administration met with town officials and student representatives in the days leading up to the playoff games, including the day before the final championship game to discuss student reaction.

In addition, careful planning went into preparations for both games. UNH Police and Durham Police worked cooperatively with 14 police departments, including state police and three county sheriff's offices. Durham Police provided briefings to outside police agencies prior to Thursday, so that outside agencies would know what to expect. UNH Police had all campus dumpsters emptied Saturday prior to the game to eliminate dumpster fires.

Student Affairs met with Greek leadership to underscore UNH's expectations for student behavior. Residential Life staff met with all hall directors to discuss the university's expectations. An op-ed article appeared in the student paper, authored by student affairs staff, outlining student behavior expectations. A request was made to the school newspaper staff to write news articles on university expectations for behavior, and programs planned during the weekend. Two full articles appeared last week. Two half-page ads were published in the student paper asking students to behave responsibly and reminding them of planned campus events for Friday and Saturday nights.

The Memorial Union Building and Hamel Recreation Center hosted a total of several hundred students during and after the game on Saturday. Big screen televisions were set up in common areas, and there was food and entertainment.

Both UNH and Durham Police met with Greek leadership prior to both games. The Greek houses all voluntarily agreed not to host registered parties that would include outside guests not affiliated with the chapter houses. Students in Greek leadership positions patrolled the streets with police, and after the disturbance ended around midnight, took to the streets to clean up debris.

Durham Police Chief David Kurz sent letters to all downtown businesses, giving them tips on securing their property, including taking in all trash bins and removing loose signs. During and after the game on Thursday, and again on Saturday, extra police patrols were be visible throughout the campus and the town of Durham. In addition, faculty and staff also were patrolling, to insure that all

students stayed safe.

The Durham/UNH Fire Department provided double shift coverage Saturday night, with fire trucks in downtown locations. In addition, they doubled the number of fire inspectors, including two inspectors from the state fire marshal's office.

“Clearly, there needs to be a significant culture change on our campus,” Hart said. “Our short-term planning doesn't solve the bigger problem, and the bigger problem is the lack of respect many of our students have for their community.”

She said the university will explore the idea of hosting a summit over the summer on student behavior. It would include UNH Police, Durham Police, Justiceworks, and key student leaders from the Greek community and student government from UNH as well as other universities around the country that have experienced unlawful and disrespectful behavior, such as Ohio, Kansas and Minnesota universities.

“UNH is the state university that we want citizens to be proud of, not ashamed of,” Hart said.

[Back to UNH News Bureau](#)