

Proactive policy formalizes Mini-Term expectations

By AMY BRYSON

As students travel across the country and world over Mini-Term, some have chosen to visit a local bar and drink.

"Whenever our students are traveling anywhere, the basic expectation is that all of our student Code of Conduct rules be followed as if [the students] were on campus," said Tom Clayton, director of academic programs and head of Mini-Term.

Chaperone supervision was reemphasized for Mini-Term this year. Chaperones are required to remain with students at all times at night and have direct access in a delimited area during the day. There were no reported incidents involving Mini-Term this year.

In the past, the student Code of Conduct expectations for Mini-Term were in place, but over the years have been formally written down. The specific Mini-Term policy is available online, stating, "All the basic expectations for student behavior at NCSSM—from meeting specified curfews to prohibition on alcohol and sexual activity—apply on Mini-Term trips, with violators to be addressed under the Code of Student Conduct. Prior to departure, trip sponsors should discuss standards of behavior with their students and develop a contract for responsible behavior to be signed by each student and her/his parents."

Through this policy, a signed contract between students and sponsors, and a mandatory meeting held before departure, students are aware of school regulations and sanctions for violations.

"There was a mandatory meeting for anyone who was traveling during mini-term in which the rules were explained by [Michael] Reidy," Chase* said. "It was no ambiguous matter concerning drinking and the consequences. The rules are the same as if one were still at school."

This year the student behavior policies were updated to be more specific and to clearly state rules.

"Traveling to areas where students can obtain alcohol, we are being proactive, trying to stay on top of [drinking during mini-term]," Clayton said. "We want to spell out to students and parents that there are particular guidelines and expectations."

However, some students view this policy as more of an unrealistic limitation.

"I think that [drinking] should be allowed in countries where the kids are above the

drinking age," Lucy* said. "It's part of the experience of going to this different culture; drinking is part of the European experience. I understand safety concerns, but there are ways that it could be managed without eliminating drinking altogether."

However, safety isn't the only reason for these policies.

"When we are traveling, the reality is it is even more important that we present ourselves well so that not to harm students or the reputation of the school," Clayton said.

Administration feels this policy has been effective and that there have not been substantial violation problems. Clayton said he does not recall a year of more than one or two infringements.

"We have not kept stats [of drinking over Mini-Term] because it hasn't been a problem," he said. "There have only been notable examples over the years. We have had both examples of instances that have been reported and charged, as well as rumors that have not had enough evidence to [lead to] charges. It's not that we are not aware, it's that it is not so much an issue. Drinking is not an outrageous, over-the-top issue here either on campus or during trips."

Some students, however, paint a different picture of this issue.

"I didn't think it was that big of a deal," said Polly*, who drank during her Mini-Term trip last year and says that she received sanctions. (see sidebar)

Because of such incidents, many students feel the policy is ineffective and unrealistic.

"I think their rules are irrelevant when so far away from campus and especially when in a foreign country whose laws permit a seventeen- or eighteen-year-old to drink legally," Chase said. "I feel like it's a precarious situation to place a kid in, and I think everyone would benefit under a different system. The chaperones simply can't monitor everyone closely enough to prevent drinking and still allow the trip to be truly enjoyable. If the chaperones try to exert too much control, everyone gets frustrated and the trip is made almost a waste of money."

Despite the disagreements of these students, Clayton backs the policy and remains optimistic about Mini-Term.

"I hope expectations are clear," he said. "My goal is [for students] to have a safe, fun and education Mini-Term experience, not interrupted by any judicial instances."

* Names have been changed.

WIESEL: trip provides life lessons

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At the weekly classes, the group discussed *Night* and learned about Wiesel and the Jewish religion. Tougas believes that the nearly 50 people who took the class were testimonials to the power of Wiesel's life.

"He inspires generosity in people," she said. "It's good for your heart."

Wiesel's appearance came on the tenth anniversary of the ECHO Foundation. In 1997, after Wiesel spoke in front of 23,000 people in Charlotte, he offered money to bring speakers and programs to the area to develop his message. The ECHO Foundation began with this seed money,

according to its website.

Senior Jeremy Steinman said that the group, which met weekly to prepare for the trip, was very diverse in terms of "religion, sexual orientation and age" but that Wiesel brought them together.

"We all had a common goal," he said. "We all wanted to make a difference."

Steinman asked Wiesel about the new translation of *Night*, the book that inspired him to take the class and trip.

"It's really given me a different perspective on life," he said. "Someone else had it much worse than I did."

Vestal said that most of

the weekly sessions ended with someone crying. She said that there were days when they would walk down the hallway and "no one could say a word."

"For me, it's been an emotional roller coaster," she said.

But, Vestal said the group learned to support each other through the difficult material and activities, and that they were inspired to do more.

"It's not just about the Holocaust, it's about what's going on today in the world. There are so many people being oppressed," she said. "We still need to help out and prevent [the Holocaust] from happening again."

Drinking... ... in New Orleans in 2006

After a week of fixing houses, painting playgrounds and some sightseeing, Polly* and two friends explored another part of Louisiana culture.

"Anyone who's been to New Orleans knows that there's alcohol everywhere," Polly said. "There's drive-in daiquiri places and bars at every corner and in between. [My friends] just walked up to a drive-through and bought daiquiris. We drank them walking around the French Quarter."

Polly only took a few sips of her friends' drinks, but once back at school after Spring Break she came face to face with the school's zero-tolerance policy.

"One person's boyfriend took the AIM conversation they had about the trip and turned it in," Polly said. "I told them I didn't know anything about it because I thought it was stupid."

However, Polly said that other people's incident reports indicated she did. She said that after hearing, she received a suspension on all weekends, five hours of a graduation set-up and a mandate to attend an alcohol clinic for which she paid. Despite her punishments, Polly does not regret her few sips of drinks.

"I regret not doing something to deserve my suspension," she said.

... in Italy in 2006

In a country where the drinking age is 16, students are still required to follow the school's conduct policy, but temptation often arises when alcohol is easy to obtain.

"I went out to a bar over Mini-Term and drank with a group of friends," Chase* said. "We all wanted to go out and have a good time while we had the chance."

On the second night, however, the students were caught.

"I threw up in an elevator, and a Spaniard informed the front desk," Chase said. "The chaperones were then notified and they found me in my room, and there was no question whether or not I was intoxicated."

Once back in the country, Chase says that only he went through the trials and was sentenced for that night's excursion, despite the number of students on the trip he says who drank.

"Pretty much everyone on our trip drank," said Lucy*, another student on the 2006 Italy Mini-Term trip. "I can only think of two people who didn't and there were probably 12 or more of us on the trip."

* Names have been changed.

Note from the editors: These are the stories and opinions of a few students and do not represent the student body's opinions or actions as a whole. Each of these events occurred in 2006 before restrictions on supervision were reemphasized.