Police report fewer calls for ECSU parties

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WILLIMANTIC — The numbers are in and town and Eastern Connecticut State University officials couldn’t be more pleased.

It appears the number of wild parties that have been a thorn in the side of the community are down.

The Willimantic Police Department unveiled statistics Wednesday showing the number of off-campus house parties went down 52 percent and drunken-driving arrests also decreased.

There were 32 off-campus house parties requiring police intervention during the fall 2014 semester, down 52 percent from the 2013 fall semester, when there were 66 house parties that drew local law enforcers.

Willimantic Police Cpl. Stanley Parizo Jr. attributed the decrease to education efforts by Willimantic police, who notified Eastern students of their “no-tolerance” policy this fall.

“We had a huge campaign when the kids came back,” he said.

Parizo said the department has a “no-tolerance” policy regarding raucous behavior exhibited by Eastern students.

Under the policy, city police strictly enforced the law and were quick to make arrests at noisy parties.

Windham Mayor Ernest Eldridge said this morning he was pleased to hear there was a significant decrease in reported house parties.

“I’m pleased they went down,” he said. “It would be nice if there weren’t any.”

He acknowledged, however, that is “probably a pipe dream.”

ECSU Vice President for Student Affairs Kenneth Bedini also weighed in on the statistics regarding the number of house parties.

“These numbers are clearly a positive outcome of the collaborative efforts Eastern and local officials have been making to extend our code of conduct to off-campus student behavior,” he said in an e-mailed statement.

“While we have had a long-standing partnership with the Willimantic Police Department and other local officials, we made a renewed effort this past sum-

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mer to discuss ways to improve town/gown relations.

“The results are good news for Eastern and the community,” Bedini continued.

In-custody arrests for breach of peace, however, were up slightly from the fall 2013 semester. Willimantic said they made 35 in-custody arrests for breach of peace at house parties held by Eastern students, up from the 2013 fall semester, when police made 33 in-custody arrests for breach of peace.

The number of infractions issued for public disturbances increased from 7 to 21 infractions between the fall 2013 and fall 2014 semesters.

This fall, Parizo said the message regarding the zero-tolerance policy “spread like wildfire.”

However, Parizo said the department also has a good relationship with the students at Eastern.

“They’re well-behaved and we hope to continue with that partnership,” he said.

One initiative that has made a big difference, according to Parizo, is having police canines outside Blarney’s, a bar at 49 High St., when the bar closes.

“There are very few bar fights because of the presence of the canines,” he said. “That has been very successful.”

Police will continue to enforce town ordinances, which prohibit open containers, and Connecticut State law regarding underage drinking.

Parizo said there were four drunken-driving arrests involving ECSU students this past fall, down from 7 during fall 2013.

“What we’re really pleased with is the drunk driving numbers,” he said.

Parizo, however, said he hopes more students will be responsible and not participate in underage drinking.

He noted Windham Community Memorial Hospital admits several intoxicated students from Eastern and the University of Connecticut. “It’s constant,” Parizo said.

Town and Eastern officials, as well as campus and Thread City police, have been working together to crack down on partying behavior, a partnership Parizo said has been effective.

As part of that partnership, Parizo noted town and Eastern officials have gone on ride-alongs with city police to better understand their role in the community.

Also, on the first day of classes this year, a group of university and town officials, as well as police from Eastern and Willimantic, visited off-campus houses to warn Eastern students of the rules and regulations at the university.

Students were informed the student code of conduct was recently extended to apply to off-campus Eastern students.

Depending on the seriousness of the violation, students can be disciplined in a variety of ways under the code of conduct, including expulsion, suspension, disciplinary probation, disciplinary warning, restitution, residence hall separation or a residence hall warning.

Eldridge said Eastern really “stepped up to the plate” in terms of enforcement of activity off-campus.

“They wanted to segregate and do their own thing,” he said. “I think it’s all just making everybody aware that we have a no-tolerance policy.”

Eastern students returned to campus for the spring semester last week and, thus far, Parizo said there haven’t been many house parties.

“The house parties are the problem for us,” he said.

He noted that over the years, raucous behavior by Eastern students has included urination on private property and lewd behavior.