

METROPOLITAN TIMES

Cluster of incidents poses query: What's ailing midshipmen?

By Tom Stuckey
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ANNAPOLIS — Midshipmen at the U.S. Naval Academy pledge never to lie, cheat or steal. It's called the honor concept.

How well midshipmen get the concept is once again being called into question after an embarrassing spate of run-ins with the law. Just this month:

- A midshipman and four former students were charged with taking part in a car theft ring.
- A top-ranked midshipman officer was put in the brig in Quantico, Va., accused of sexually harassing four women and threatening one who reported him.
- A midshipman was arrested on charges he fondled a toddler while visiting an Annapolis home on leave.
- Two midshipmen were arrested after they got drunk and crawled in the second-floor window of one student's former girlfriend.

This comes on the heels of a drug investigation last fall in which five midshipmen were charged with selling LSD and 19 more were charged with using it.

At the compact campus along the Severn River, the question that hangs in the air is "Why?"

Why is this happening at the Naval Academy and not at West Point or the Air Force Academy?

For Adm. Charles Larson, who came to Annapolis 20 months ago with orders to restore the Naval Academy's tarnished image in the wake of a cheating scandal, the recent events are unrelated and do not mean that there is something

"systemically wrong here."

"I think we've made enormous progress in the last 20 months. I think the institution is turning. The rudder is taking hold," Adm. Larson said in an interview last week.

But others are not so sure that the academy has simply been hit with an unfortunate string of unrelated incidents.

"The system is broke," said James Barry, a professor of ethics and leadership at the academy.

"It is hard to argue with any logic that these are isolated incidents," Mr. Barry said.

Even though Adm. Larson insists the academy is on the right tack, he ordered a one-week stand-down Tuesday, directing midshipmen to spend the time they would normally be on leave talking about the problems and what should be done about them.

The 1990s have been a difficult decade for the Naval Academy.

The problems began with charges of sexual harassment that included one highly publicized incident in which a female midshipman was handcuffed to a urinal and photographed by male classmates.

Then in 1992, a stolen copy of an electrical engineering exam circulated through the junior class — the biggest cheating scandal in academy history.

Adm. Larson, a four-star admiral nearing the end of a stellar career, agreed to return for a second tour as superintendent to try to put the academy back on course.

He expanded the academy's ethics curriculum, put out the word that misbehavior would no longer be tolerated and told midshipmen



A drill instructor speaks with midshipmen last week. Naval Academy Superintendent Adm. Charles Larson canceled weekday leave starting yesterday after a series of incidents tainted the academy's reputation.

that their duty to report illegal or unacceptable behavior must outweigh loyalty to classmates.

Amanda Brooks, a senior from The Woodlands, Texas, credits Adm. Larson and other top officials with doing a great deal to turn the academy around, but said there are still far too many midshipmen who want to beat the system, not be a part of it.

Fred Guy, director of the Hoffberger Center for Professional Ethics at the University of Baltimore, consulted with academy officials about their ethics curriculum last October and said "their hearts are in the right place."

But he doubts that the current problems are just happenstance. "The impression I get is that ... there are rules and restrictions that the midshipmen themselves have to abide by, and once they are off campus or they no longer feel under those restrictions, it's kind of like it's liberty and anything goes," Mr. Guy said.

Nine mids treated for alcoholism

ANNAPOLIS, Md. (AP) — Nine midshipmen at the Naval Academy have been treated for alcoholism over the past two years and allowed to return to classes, academy officials say.

The Navy has a "zero-tolerance" policy toward alcohol and drug abuse but gives midshipmen a chance to overcome alcoholism.

Two of the nine later left the academy without graduating, one was expelled after a relapse of alcoholism and another left for reasons unrelated to alcohol, academy officials said.

The academy has been offering alcohol rehabilitation to midshipmen for more than 15 years, at a cost of \$16,000 per midshipman, said academy spokesman Capt. Tom Jurkowsky.

"You have an investment in an

individual, whether it be here or in the fleet, when you give someone a myriad of training," he said.

"Expensive? Yes, but it's also expensive to discard an individual out of hand without sticking with that individual and giving him a chance," said Capt. Jurkowsky.

In addition to the midshipmen treated for alcoholism, another 18 midshipmen have resigned or been expelled for alcohol-related offenses in the past two academic years, Capt. Jurkowsky said.

During that time, the academy has moved to reduce drinking among cadets, including a requirement that midshipmen on watch report those who return to the dormitory drunk.