

# 'It had a sour, weird smell'

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*Editor's Note: Given the sensitive nature of the topic, names have been changed to protect UPA students' identities.*

Excelling students plus dedicated teachers equal a good school, but what happens when drugs are added to the equation? Administrators have seen an increase in substance use on campus and have looked into ways to combat it at UPA.

Director of Student Services **Andrew Yau** informed the Santa Clara County Board of Education on Nov. 6, 2019, about the Brief Intervention (BI) program course, which has been implemented this year for the first time at UPA.

"The goal of [the BI program] is not to stop students from using drugs, but to let them reflect on what makes them take drugs, how they behave when using drugs and make their own decisions," Yau said. "Hopefully by the end of the program, they consider either reducing or stopping their usage. We can't decide for them; it's up to the individual."

The BI program focuses on individuals who have been caught using drugs on school property, and its goal is to inform students who have recently taken harmful substances about the consequences they have on their bodies and behavior.

The program consists of counseling from five to 30 minutes, depending on the severity of the case. The BI program also helps students get in contact with therapists or special alcohol and drug treatment agencies. The program was put into place this year because of the overall increase in drug use on campus.

In the fall of 2019, posters warning of the consequences of vaping and using drugs were put up in every UPA bathroom as a precautionary measure. Additionally, Facilities Manager at the Cathedral of Faith **Lynn Lazo** said campus supervisors and security monitor halls and restrooms regularly.

"We have seen an increase in students using controlled substances on campus," Yau said. "Either more people are using it, or we did not notice the students before. I suspect it is a little bit of both."

This was the situation of a seventh grader who handed out marijuana edibles to students in January.

"It started after [Winter] break," freshman **Jane Doe**, who was offered drugs by a student on campus, said. "[The seventh grader] started bragging to our friends about doing drugs. Then one time, he brought a cereal-looking thing that had a sour, weird smell. He gave [the edible] to a bunch of our friends and we didn't know what it was. Luckily I didn't take it from him because I smelled it and it smelled bad."

Despite removing herself from harm's way, Doe did not report the seventh grader to school supervisors.

"I didn't want to make my friends mad or get in trouble, so I didn't say anything," Doe said.

The National Rehab Directory estimates that about 65 percent of drug use on high school campuses go unreported. Executive Director **David Porter** believes that reporting drug usage is a dilemma for many students at UPA.

"[Students who do not participate in drug use] are forced to make a decision to either do nothing and say nothing, knowingly continuing the breakdown of our community, or damage their re-

lationship with their peers," wPorter said.

Expulsion, as in the case of the seventh grade student, can occur when a student "knowingly possesses or uses illegal drugs, or sells or solicits the sale of a controlled substance, while at school, on school premises, or at a school function," as outlined on page 53 of UPA's Comprehensive School Health and Safety Plan 2019–2020.

In determining the severity of a student's case, the executive director or designee first determines if a student has committed an expellable offense. Within 30 days of this judgement, the student then has a hearing in front of the administrative panel to determine whether the student should be expelled. UPA's Board of Trustees has the final vote on whether a student is expelled.

Other disciplinary action can be taken besides expulsion, such as suspension and mandatory counseling or even involving the San Jose Police Department.

Doe estimates between three to five students, apart from the expelled student, had in-school suspension or other disciplinary action for not informing supervisors of the January situation earlier. Yau declined to comment on the disciplinary actions that were taken, citing privacy concerns.

Porter said administration is not allowed to report out direct student discipline or make their responses public.

"I can tell you that a student was expelled [from the January incident] and other students were responded to in accordance with our board-approved discipline matrix," Porter said.

Another substance-abuse situation arose just before February Break, where one sophomore and three freshmen were caught with marijuana on campus.

"It was weed, but in a pen. But [teachers and administrators] couldn't do anything about it because they couldn't find the pen to prove it," Sally Brown, a friend of two of the freshmen, said.

According to Yau, faculty and staff need to have probable cause in order to search a student's belongings and need to find evidence of a controlled substance, which includes paraphernalia, in order for a student to get in trouble.

Porter is saddened by the increase in drug use on campus.

"The negativity [of substance abuse on campus] has ripples that cause harm to the fabric of our community," Porter said.

In April 2019, then-sophomore **John Smith** walked in on students vaping in the Learning Center restroom.

"I just walked in and there were, like, three guys vaping or something," Smith said. "I didn't realize it at first, but when I did, I walked out. Well, I pretty much ran."

Smith said supervisors, when investigating the incident, caught him on camera outside the restroom and then pulled him out of class.

"I was really scared because I didn't want to get in trouble and my grades would go down," Smith said. "I kind of wish I didn't walk in on them, so I would've not had that stress."

Smith, who did not want to involve himself with the situation, did not ask about the students' consequences.

"I didn't want to ask what happened to those people," Smith said. "I wanted to stay as far away as possible."