Students for Sensible Drug Policy assembles

New Group, from page 5

...the problems that the current War on Drugs presents.

The problems that the drug war presents include the fact that the drug provision of the HEA does and will continue to have discriminatory consequences if it remains as it stands today. Because drug enforcement in the United States focuses disproportionately on the poor and minorities, drug convictions are more frequent among these groups, and it is inevitable that an unequal number of poor and minorities will be and are denied financial aid every year.

Secondly, because SSDP (and others) believe that education is a fundamental component in the overall success of the drug war, the denial of this essential aspect of the solution seems to be nothing short of foolishness.

Sunday, The Boston Globe ran a front-page story regarding the HEA in which Eileen O’Leary, the director of financial aid at Stonehill College, said, “You could do nothing better for your citizen, especially the poor one, than let them (sic) get an education.” Simply denying financial aid, and in some cases thusly denying a college education, in no way responds to the problem at hand. Substance abuse is a grave and threatening problem in our country today, but denying people education is not going to help solve that problem.

The constitutionality of the drug provision of the HEA is also in question. Proponents for the annulment of the provision are quick to point out that Congress does not have the right to escalate those penalties already imposed by the judicial system.

That is to say, once an offender has paid his fine, or served his jail time, or performed the allotted community service set down by the courts, Congress is stepping outside its constitutional limits by punishing said offender again, when it denies federal aid.

Whether or not the drug provision is constitutional will not be ruled on for some time, and perhaps may never even reach the courts, but SSDP has had a fair amount of success with a few influential members of Congress.

Twice Congress has voted on the nullification of the provision and, though defeated both times, progress is being made in the legislative body of the government.

As the president of HC SSDP, Liam McReilly ’04 identifies what he and all members of SSDP find to be a most disturbing fact: “the war on drugs, as it stands now, is a war on the poor and minorities.”

The facts speak for themselves. African-Americans make up approximately 13% of the population of the United States and an estimated 13% of all drug users, but represented 55% of drug convictions and more than 70% of drug related incarcerations (U.S. Department of Justice, 1998).

The ultimate intent of SSDP is to eradicate the ignorance surrounding the United States’ policy regarding the war on drugs and, as an ultimate end, “…to empower students to create change, to control and understand behavior, and to make choices that are conducive to a healthy and productive lifestyle” (Constitution of the Students for Sensible Drug Policy Chapter at the College of the Holy Cross).

SPUD embarks on a new year

BY RACHAEL ADAMS
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Last Sunday, an estimated 450 Holy Cross volunteers from Student Programs for Urban Development (SPUD) were trained for community service at schools, hospitals, nursing homes, shelters and social service agencies throughout Worcester.

The SPUD program, founded in the 1960s, is currently the largest student-run organization at Holy Cross. Affiliated with the Office of the College Chaplains, SPUD coordinates 32 different outreach programs, all of which do direct service within the Worcester community.

With an unprecedented turnout at Sunday’s orientation, SPUD leaders expect numbers greatly surpassing last year’s. Students last semester logged 3,930 hours of community service. Student leaders are worried however, that their resources could exceed capacity.

“IT’S such a wonderful problem,” said Deirdre Brogan ’02, co-chair of SPUD, “to have so many students interested in working with the community that we need to expand even beyond the seven new programs we launched this year.”

While the co-chairs are concerned about depleting their funds due to the large number of volunteers, they are turning to other sources for assistance.

Overall, students feel that the struggles they witness within the community are the most pressing.

“We hope that our service aids, in some small way, in the everyday struggles of many Worcester residents,” said Justin Holmes ’02, co-chair of SPUD, “but we recognize that for real social change to happen, our commitment to service - in all its forms - must be a life-long one.”

An integral part of SPUD this year is the new “time-out” initiative, designed to build community among volunteers, offer a chance to reflect and share service experiences and allow students a space to deepen their commitment to serve. These social gatherings will be offered by Program Directors three times each semester.

SPUD Programs begin next week.

For more information, contact SPUD@holycross.edu.