U.S. Laws That International Students and Scholars Should Know

While at Yale you are expected to follow laws and policies that govern a variety of daily life and academic activities. There are different levels of law in the U.S including federal, state, and local community laws which will differ depending on the particular jurisdiction. Violating a U.S. law can have different consequences for an international student or scholar than for your American friends and can negatively impact your U.S. immigration status. While it is unlikely that you will encounter any legal difficulties, there are times in life when the unexpected happens. Knowing the law can make all the difference. OISS advisers can provide legal referrals, and are available to listen confidentially, provide guidance and discuss any concerns you may have.

Important Laws and Policies

Drinking Age

1. The legal drinking age is 21.
2. It is a violation of the law to purchase alcohol for those under age 21.
3. The legal limit for drinking and driving is a blood alcohol concentration of 0.08. It's a good idea to research [2] what that means for you.
4. Driving “under the influence” of alcohol (known as DUI) could lead to the State Department revoking the U.S. visa [3] in your passport. If you are too impaired to drive, use safer transportation options [4].
5. Read and observe Yale’s Alcohol and Other Drugs policies [5].

Drug Use

1. The possession or use of marijuana is prohibited by federal law and the state of Connecticut.
2. Recreational use of marijuana is permitted in some states like Massachusetts, but it remains a federal crime to possess or consume marijuana. Even though state law in Massachusetts permits recreational use of marijuana, it is not permitted on federal land including popular national parks like Cape Cod, or on school campuses which receive federal funding.
3. At an airport or port of entry to the U.S. if a non-citizen admits to an immigration official that in the past they possessed marijuana, they can be denied entry into the U.S., and/or have a visa or green card application denied. Read more from the Immigration Legal Resource Center, [6]
4. Driving under the influence of drugs can result in an arrest for Driving Under the Influence of Intoxicants (DUII) and can lead to the State Department revoking the U.S. visa. [3]
5. Read and observe Yale’s Alcohol and Other Drugs policies [5].
Sexual Misconduct

It is important for all international students and scholars to understand the definitions of consent [7] and sexual misconduct [8] as it relates to U.S. laws and Yale policies [9]. Yale has resources [10] available for all members of the Yale community who are dealing with sexual misconduct of any kind.

Sexual Harassment

Yale's Sexual Harassment and Assault Resources & Education Center [11] (SHARE) has counselors available to talk to students or meet with them 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Call any time: (203) 432-6653.

Sexual Consent

Sexual activity requires consent, which is defined as positive, unambiguous, and voluntary agreement to engage in specific sexual activity throughout a sexual encounter. Consent cannot be inferred from the absence of a “no.” A clear “yes,” verbal or otherwise, is necessary. From Yale's Definition of Sexual Consent [7].

- Yale Sexual Misconduct Policies and Definitions [12]
- Sexual Misconduct Scenarios [13]
- More information on Title IX [14]
- More on sexual consent (RAINN) [15]
- How to respond if someone is pressuring you (RAINN) [16]
- Consent- It's Simple as Tea [17] (video)

Family Situations

1. Domestic disputes [18] which result in physical harm to another person are a crime which can lead to arrest. These types of crimes are customarily handled by the police, not by family or friends, and are often reported [19] by concerned neighbors.
2. It is against the law to leave your child alone in a car or public place.
3. It is against the law to leave your pet in the car.

Bike Laws

1. Bike helmets are required for anyone under the age of 13.
2. Riding on the sidewalk is against New Haven statute and can result in a citation and fine.
3. The City of New Haven provides an online bike maps [20].

Traffic Violations

1. Become familiar with the driving laws for Connecticut before you begin driving by reviewing the DMV Driver's Manual [21].
2. If you receive a traffic ticket for a moving violation such as speeding or running a red light, refer to the CT court site [22] for information about your options. If you owe a fine, or wish to enter a plea of not guilty and go to court, it is important to respond quickly within the dates stipulated on the ticket.
3. If you receive a parking ticket from the City of New Haven, it is recommended that you act quickly if you want to dispute the ticket. If you don't, make the payment [23] as soon as possible because the fine will increase over time.

Panhandlers

Panhandling (or begging) is an offense which can be cited and fined in the U.S., but it doesn't stop panhandling from occurring. While panhandling is not unique to New Haven or to the U.S., it is something that you should be aware of [24] and know how to deal with, especially if it becomes aggressive panhandling.