Boarders get shredded  
ULPD to issue citations for reckless skateboarding

A student demonstrates skateboard skills in the Quad.

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Student skateboarders at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette voiced their concerns after campus police announced plans to issue citations for criminal damage to property beginning in February.

After skateboarders made $10,000 in damages to the university's new Master Plan renovations, the UL Lafayette Police Department will begin issuing citations to reckless skateboarders who damage UL Lafayette property. According to university officials, chunks of sandstone from the newly renovated quad, benches and handrails in front of the student union and furniture behind Wharton Hall have been severely damaged from grinding and other skateboarding tricks.

UL Lafayette Police Public Information Officer, Sgt. Billy Abrams, said the cost of the damage has now become significant enough to take action.

"Where the damage amounts to $500, but is less than $50,000, the defendant shall be fined not more than $1,000, or imprisoned with or without hard labor for not more than two years, or both," said Abrams while reading from the Louisiana Criminal Law and Motor Vehicle Handbook.

"In the next few weeks, after we let everyone know what's going on, we will issue warnings," he continued. "Once we start issuing citations in February, it will be a summons for criminal damage to property. That could mean an arrest, going to court and, perhaps at some point, you may have to make restitution for any damage you may have cost the university.

"These damages are not something you can just throw a coat of paint on or find a color match -- this is serious damage."

Although many skateboarders agreed that reckless skateboarding should not be allowed on campus, they said proper measures should be taken first to make skateboarders aware of the issue.

"I don't think they are going too far with giving citations," said Victor Darjean, a sophomore majoring in mechanical engineering. "But I also think that if you don't want the issue to continue, then the university should put up signs warning us that we will receive one if caught violating property."

"I've been pursuing renovations for the park because there is a huge need for an area to skateboard in Lafayette," said Cazes. "I got a lot of support from the Ragin' Cajuns community, but I think we need more support from the administration and students."

"It's depressing to work so hard to make things nice for our students just to have them torn up by these skateboarders."

"Skaters are kind of nomadic," said Cooper. "If there's a new spot to be tagged, it will be. Similar to people wanting to try a new restaurant in town. Once the hype of this spot dies down, the university shouldn't have anything to worry about. It's only appealing because it's all shiny and new."

William Crist, the director of facility management at UL Lafayette, said as UL Lafayette's Master Plan makes the campus more handicap-accessible, skateboarders causing criminal damage may threaten the safety of the students.

"The damage to the quad is estimated at about $10,000, the benches in front of the student union are about $600 each, and the stainless steel handrails are also $1,000 each to replace," said Crist. "We run the risk of students cutting their hands on the handrails because of the scratches from the skateboards. It's depressing to work so hard to make things nice for our students just to have them torn up by these skateboarders."

"The sandstone benches in the quad all have to be replaced," Crist continued. "If we only replace pieces then it's not going to match and will never look as nice as it did when it was originally installed."

UL Lafayette Police Chief Joey Sturm, along with Timothy Cazes, president of Ragin' Cajuns Skateboarding at UL Lafayette, are scheduled to meet with the UL Lafayette Student Government Association on Jan. 25. There, they will discuss a $200,000 budget to renovate the "rundown" university-owned skateboard park on East Lewis Street in an effort to give skateboard enthusiasts an alternative skating location.

"I've been pursuing renovations for the park because there is a huge need for an area to skateboard in Lafayette," said Cazes. "I got all the major skateboard influencers in Lafayette and the surrounding areas to put in their input and help with the design of the skate park; all we need now are the funds.

"I was pursuing a concrete, public skate park that had bathrooms and seating for those who wanted to watch. I would like to see students get employed to work

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there and manage the skate park part-time.”

John Wales, director of facility planning at UL Lafayette, said he believes renovating the skate park is an “inherent liability” for the university.

“When you build a structure that allows people to take risky moves and are not forcing them to wear helmets and protective gear, there is a huge issue of people getting injured,” said Wales. “We inherited that property, what we call the youth park, in the land trade with the city-parish. The skateboarding pit came with the land swap and we probably never would have built a skate park on our campus, but we now have that one and we’re trying to deal with it the way that it is. The president said he has approved of keeping it for now.”