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UMass halts drug informant program

By [Matt Rocheleau](#) and [Eric Bosco](#)

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The University of Massachusetts Amherst will suspend the use of confidential informants pending a full review of its program.

The University of Massachusetts Amherst said Tuesday that it will suspend the use of confidential informants pending a full review of the program after a disclosure that a student informant for campus police died of a heroin overdose.

Chancellor Kumble Subbaswamy said he ordered the program's suspension along with a more comprehensive review than was previously planned. In a campuswide e-mail to students on Tuesday, Subbaswamy indicated that the program could be terminated, after the review.

Tuesday's message, praised by student leaders, marked a shift from statements the university made Monday in defending the program. UMass said then that it would examine only two aspects: whether to require that informants in drug cases get help for possible addictions and whether to notify parents when a student is recruited into the program.

“The well-being and health of our students is paramount, and the university must do all in its power to educate and protect our community from the dangers of drug abuse,” Subbaswamy wrote Tuesday. “We must also focus our best efforts on sustaining an environment where every student can learn, thrive, and mature.”

On Sunday, [a Globe story detailed](#) how campus police recruited a student caught selling drugs to become an informant. Police told the student that if he agreed to inform on others, the school would not pursue criminal charges or disciplinary action against him and would not notify his parents about the arrangement.

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The student agreed, and less than a year later the 20-year-old junior died of a heroin overdose. The death last October has prompted concern over the informant program and criticism from the student's parents and friends over whether the university and its police force could have done more to help him. The Globe has identified him only by his middle name, Logan, to protect the family's privacy.

UMass police have said they never suspected that Logan was a heroin user. When police caught him selling LSD, they found a hypodermic needle, but they said it could have been used for other drugs. Officers said Logan denied having a drug problem and refused treatment.

The school has said there currently are no student informants working with campus police. Subbaswamy wrote Tuesday that the program's suspension will not affect any ongoing investigations.

He also wrote that the campus Police Department, which has reported to the vice chancellor for administration and finance, will now report to the vice chancellor for student affairs and campus life. The switch, he said, will ensure that campus police are "more aligned with and responsive to the concerns of students."

"I am confident that opening new lines of communication and coordination will benefit our students and the entire campus community," he said.

Campus police declined to comment on the developments Tuesday night and referred questions to the university's media relations office.

On Tuesday night, Student Government Association president Vinayak Rao welcomed the university's decision to review the program.

"I think it's a good opportunity to come together and to review a program that really makes a lot of students uncomfortable," he said.

Rao said the Globe report on Sunday raised significant concerns among students, many of whom were not aware the informants program existed.

"I think a lot of students are finding out what this program is for the first time," he said.

Rao said he will reserve judgment on whether aspects of the program should change until the review is complete.

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Student Sebastian Vivas, a junior, said he, too, is glad that the university is reviewing the informants initiative. "CIs on campus make me uncomfortable," he said. "It's unethical. It's just a really bad, really unfair spot to put kids in."

Katherine Doherty, a sophomore, agreed. "I was reassured that [Subbaswamy's] going to look into it, but I was also angry that I didn't know there were CIs on campus, because how am I going to make friends like that if I

don't know if they're going to rat me out," she said.

David L. Perry, president of the International Association of Campus Law Enforcement, said in an interview Tuesday that some campus police departments use students as confidential informants and that the practice is typically more common at larger schools.

Officials from at least four other large schools in the area — Boston College, Boston University, Northeastern University, and Tufts University — said their campus police departments do not use informants.

Perry, chief of police at Florida State University, said his department uses confidential informants on occasion in serious cases. But he said they would not recruit someone to be an informant if there is suspicion that he or she may be addicted to or actively using illicit drugs. He said the department requires informants to undergo detailed questioning to ensure they are not abusing illegal substances.

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Globe correspondent Kayla Marchetti contributed to this report. Matt Rocheleau can be reached at matthew.rocheleau@globe.com. Follow him on Twitter [@mrochele](https://twitter.com/mrochele).



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