

Alcohol and Other Drugs on Campus

The Scope of the Problem

by Daniel Ari Kapner

The most widespread health problem on college and university campuses in the United States is high-risk alcohol and other drug (AOD) use. Recent reports confirm that the nation's campuses continue to encounter significant consequences as a result of this problem. This *Infacts/Resources* offers an overview of the problem and highlights effective prevention approaches that many campuses are currently following.

What we know about the prevalence of high-risk AOD behaviors comes from a variety of sources, including the following:

- *A Call to Action: Changing the Culture of Drinking at U.S. Colleges*, a report by the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA)
- The Harvard School of Public Health's College Alcohol Study (CAS)
- The University of Michigan's annual Monitoring the Future (MTF) survey
- Reports by the Core Institute at Southern Illinois University at Carbondale

For additional information

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Drinking on Campus

College student drinking is widespread. Studies suggest that between 1993 and 2001, approximately 44 percent of college students were heavy drinkers, defined for men as five or more drinks in a row on at least one occasion in the past two weeks, and for women as four or more drinks.¹

In addition, drinking behavior has become increasingly polarized since 1993, with more students abstaining but also more students frequently drinking heavily. The percentage of students who abstained from alcohol increased from 16 percent in 1993 to 22.8 percent in 2007,² while the percentage of those engaged in frequent heavy drinking decreased from 19.7 percent in 1993 to 19 percent in 2006.³ At the same time, the percentage of non-heavy drinking students decreased from 39.7 percent in 1993 to 36.3 percent in 2001, while that of occasional heavy drinkers increased from 24.3 percent in 1993 to 45.5 percent in 2006.³ Campuses should take a look at how such a polarization in drinking behavior may affect their student population.

Additionally, students report getting drunk more frequently in 2001 than in 1993. In 1993, nearly a quarter of students said they became drunk more than three times during the past 30 days; this rate increased to 29.4 percent in 2001. The percentage of students who said they drank alcohol to get drunk climbed from 39.9 percent in 1993 to 48.2 percent in 2001.¹

Drinking rates vary considerably on different campuses. For instance, the 2000 CAS report suggests that campuses in the Northeast and the Midwest have higher rates of drinking than campuses elsewhere.⁴ In addition, drinking varies among different populations on campus. Men are more likely to drink heavily than are women.⁵ According to studies, fraternity members⁴ and athletes⁶

are more likely to drink heavily and to suffer negative consequences than are other groups on campus.⁷ According to a special analysis of 2005 data from the Core Institute, high-risk drinking is highest among American Indian students (52.6 percent), followed by white (50.2 percent), and Hispanic students (49.3 percent), with black (23.3 percent) and Asian and Pacific Islander students (33.7 percent) reporting the lowest levels.⁸

The Core Institute suggests that students at historically black colleges and universities drink less than students at predominantly white institutions do.⁹ Few studies have examined AOD use among students with disabilities or among gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender students, areas where the research community could focus more attention.



Consequences of Alcohol Use

The consequences that both drinking and nondrinking students suffer due to alcohol use are even more alarming. Compiling results from a number of studies, as a result of alcohol use, every year:¹⁰

- 1,700 college students die from alcohol-related causes, and 1,300 of these deaths involve drinking and driving.⁸
- 600,000 students suffer nonfatal injuries.⁸
- Nearly 500,000 students have unprotected sex.⁸
- More than 100,000 students are too intoxicated to know whether they consented to sexual intercourse.¹⁰
- 1.2–1.5 percent of students attempt suicide because of alcohol or other drug use.¹⁰
- More than 150,000 students develop a health problem related to alcohol.¹⁰
- 11 percent of students damage property.¹⁰
- 2.8 million students drive while under the influence of alcohol.⁸



Drinking on campus undermines the mission of higher education, with heavy drinking leading to a decline in academic performance. The NIAAA reports that about 25 percent of college students report academic problems caused by alcohol use, such as earning lower grades, doing poorly on exams or papers, missing class, and falling behind.¹⁰ Several AOD prevention experts suggest that heavy drinking can have a negative effect on the institution as a whole, reducing retention rates, increasing expenses from incidents of vandalism, and branding the institution a “party school.” This “party school” image may encourage more alcohol-related problems, as it attracts students who choose to be in high-risk settings. For example, researchers have found fraternities to be a social setting that draws students who desire to be in heavy drinking environments.¹¹



Secondary Effects of Alcohol Use

Students who abstain or are moderate drinkers frequently suffer from the behavior of other students who drink heavily. Even though the majority of college and university students are not heavy drinkers, with 65.5 percent abstaining from all alcohol use,² more than three-quarters of the students living in residence halls, fraternities, or sororities report that they have experienced at least one secondary effect due to another student’s drinking.¹

Following are prominent secondary effects reported by students who live on campus or in sorority or fraternity houses and who abstain or drink moderately:¹

- 60.0 percent had study or sleep interrupted.
- 47.6 percent had to take care of a drunken student.
- 29.2 percent had been insulted or humiliated.
- 19.5 percent of female respondents experienced an unwanted sexual advance.
- 19.0 percent had a serious argument or quarrel.
- 15.2 percent had property damaged.
- 8.7 percent had been pushed, hit, or assaulted.
- 1.0 percent of female respondents had been a victim of sexual assault or acquaintance rape.

The NIAAA report estimates that alcohol is involved in more than 700,000 assaults and more than 97,000 cases of sexual assault, including acquaintance

rape, among college and university students in the United States each year.¹² One study found that alcohol is one of the most significant contributors to sexual aggression among male college students.¹³

Alcohol is also associated with riots, hazing, and various forms of nonsexual violence on campus. Student riots have become a serious problem for campuses, usually taking place following sporting events or after new campus alcohol policies are created.^{14, 15, 16, 17, 18} Riots pose challenges for campus administrators and law enforcement officers and can lead to unexpected economic burdens.¹⁹ Numerous campus riots point to alcohol as a key contributing factor.^{15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20}



Community Consequences of Alcohol Use

Communities neighboring campuses also experience the secondary effects of college student drinking. Studies show that those living within one mile of a campus are much more likely to report alcohol-related noise and disturbances, vandalism, public drunkenness, and vomit and public urination by students on their property than are people living more than one mile from a campus.²¹

Neighborhoods closer to campus have a much higher density of alcohol outlets than neighborhoods farther from campus.²¹ Fully 92.1 percent of neighborhood residents within one mile of campus and 74.9 percent of those more than one mile from campus report the presence of a nearby alcohol outlet. These outlets are especially abundant near campuses that have higher levels of heavy drinking.²¹ A reduction in the number of alcohol outlets near campuses may significantly lower the secondary effects experienced by individuals residing in those areas.²¹



Other Drugs

A considerable number of students use other drugs. Monitoring the Future (MTF), based on a survey of 1,350 college and university students, reported that the following percentage of students used illicit drugs on at least one occasion in 2006:²²

- Marijuana: 30.2 percent
- Ecstasy: 2.6 percent
- Hallucinogens: 5.6 percent
- Amphetamines: 6.0 percent
- Tranquilizers: 5.8 percent
- Cocaine: 5.1 percent
- Barbiturates: 3.4 percent
- Inhalants: 1.5 percent
- Methamphetamine: 1.2 percent
- Heroin: 0.3 percent

While students use illegal drugs at much lower rates than alcohol, illicit drug use has led to serious tragedies, including violence, sexual assault and rape, hospitalization for overdoses, and premature death. Campus prevention specialists, therefore, should address recent trends in illicit drug use when designing their prevention and treatment programs.



What Campuses Are Doing to Address Alcohol and Other Drug Problems

Institutions of higher education are increasingly implementing creative programs and aggressive policies to curb AOD use and its associated negative consequences. Many campuses and communities have begun comprehensive prevention approaches that go beyond traditional educational programs to emphasize strategies aimed at changing the physical, social, legal, and economic environment on campus and in surrounding communities.

Under the banner of *environmental management*, the U.S. Department of Education’s Higher Education Center for Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse and Violence Prevention recommends the following key environmental strategies:²³

- Offer and promote social, recreational, extracurricular, and public service options that do not include alcohol and other drugs.
- Create a social, academic, and residential environment that supports health-promoting norms.
- Limit alcohol availability both on and off campus.
- Restrict marketing and promotion of alcoholic beverages both on and off campus.
- Develop and enforce campus policies and enforce local, state, and federal laws.

AOD use is a community as well as a campus problem, and campuses and communities need to collaborate to address it.²⁴ Because college presidents are most influential in creating change on campus, their active and visible efforts can be very effective in bringing together faculty, administrators, staff, students, parents, alumni, and local community members to develop and implement strong, effective policies and programs.²⁵

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Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools (OSDFS)

U.S. Department of Education
<http://www.ed.gov/osdfs>; 202-245-7896

OSDFS supports efforts to create safe schools, respond to crises, prevent alcohol and other drug abuse, ensure the health and well-being of students, and teach students good character and citizenship. The agency provides financial assistance for drug abuse and violence prevention programs and activities that promote the health and well-being of students in elementary and secondary schools and institutions of higher education.

The U.S. Department of Education's Higher Education Center for Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse and Violence Prevention

<http://www.higheredcenter.org>; 1-800-676-1730; TDD Relay-friendly, Dial 711

The Higher Education Center offers an integrated array of services to help campuses and communities come together to identify problems; assess needs; and plan, implement, and evaluate alcohol and other drug abuse and violence prevention programs. Services include training; technical assistance; publications; support for the Network Addressing Collegiate Alcohol and Other Drug Issues; and evaluation activities. The Higher Education Center's publications are free and can be downloaded from its Web site.



Other Organizations

National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information (NCADI)

<http://ncadi.samhsa.gov>; 1-800-729-6686

NCADI is the information service of the Center for Substance Abuse Prevention (CSAP), Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. NCADI is the world's largest resource clearinghouse for current

information and materials concerning substance abuse. NCADI distributes publications and other materials on substance abuse from various federal government agencies (e.g., study reports, surveys, guides, videocassettes), many of which are free of charge. NCADI offers resources on illicit drugs, alcohol and alcoholism, and subpopulations in the United States.

National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA)

<http://www.niaaa.nih.gov>; 301-443-9304

NIAAA supports and conducts biomedical and behavioral research on the causes, consequences, treatment, and prevention of alcoholism and alcohol-related problems. In 2002, NIAAA's Task Force on College Drinking published the first National Institutes of Health report on college drinking, *A Call to Action: Changing the Culture of Drinking at U.S. Colleges*. The report reveals new findings on the extent and nature of the problem, reviews the current research literature, and provides guidance to college presidents, administrators, and other policymakers on effective programs and policies. NIAAA offers a Web site on college drinking prevention: www.collegedrinkingprevention.gov/.

National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA)

<http://www.nida.nih.gov>; 301-443-1124

NIDA's mission is to lead the nation in bringing the power of science to bear on drug abuse and addiction. This charge has two critical components: The first is to support and conduct research across a broad range of disciplines. The second is to ensure that these research results are disseminated and implemented rapidly and effectively, thus significantly improving the prevention and treatment of drug abuse and addiction. NIDA offers fact sheets on various illicit drugs, which can be viewed at www.drugabuse.gov/drugpages/.

The Network Addressing Collegiate Alcohol and Other Drug Issues

<http://www.thenetwork.ws>; see Web site for telephone contacts by region

The Network Addressing Collegiate Alcohol and Other Drug Issues (Network) is a national consortium of colleges and universities formed to promote healthy campus environments by addressing issues related to alcohol and other drugs. Developed in 1987 by the U.S. Department of Education, the Network comprises member institutions that voluntarily agree to work toward a set of standards aimed at reducing AOD problems at colleges and universities. It has more than 1,600 members nationwide.



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