



The U.S. Department of Education's

**HIGHER  
EDUCATION  
CENTER**

for Alcohol,  
Drug Abuse, and  
Violence Prevention

## PREVENTION UPDATE

### First Few Weeks on Campus

Every fall, college and university campuses and communities brace for the onslaught of new and returning students. For first-year students, anecdotal evidence suggests that the first six weeks of enrollment are critical to success. Because many students initiate heavy drinking during these early days of college, the potential exists for excessive alcohol consumption to interfere with successful adaptation to campus life. This excessive drinking contributes to many problems, including vandalism, violence, sexual aggression, and even death. The transition to college is often so difficult to negotiate that about one-third of first-year students fail to enroll for their second year (*A Call to Action: Changing the Culture of Drinking at U.S. Colleges*, 2002).

Colleges and universities have initiated a number of activities during the first few weeks on campus aimed at helping students successfully transition into campus life and at reducing a range of problems related to student drinking, such as holding a number of alcohol-free social events and increasing enforcement to control potentially unruly parties and reduce underage drinking.

#### What Science Tells Us

According to the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (*A Call to Action*), the tradition of drinking has developed into a kind of culture—beliefs and customs—entrenched in every level of college students' environments. It says that there are a number of strategies that campuses and communities can implement that will contribute to a change in that culture, including implementing alcohol-free, expanded late-night student activities; responsible beverage service training; and increased enforcement of minimum drinking age laws.

#### Aztec Nights at San Diego State University

In order to provide alcohol-free alternatives for incoming and returning students, San Diego State University (SDSU) started its [Aztec Nights](#) program in the first five weeks of fall 2008. More specifically, SDSU Associated Students was asked to provide large, attractive, alternative alcohol-free programming from 10 p.m. to 2 a.m. on Thursday through Saturday nights and holidays, during the first five weeks of the academic year.

Aztec Nights is designed to provide vibrant campus nightlife and social opportunities for students, primarily students new to campus (freshmen and transfers) to help them become fully engaged in positive, substance-free social and educational activities. It organized 17 events and, in all, more than 16,000 students attended at least one event.

At a cost of about \$400,000, it was an expensive program, but the results were dramatic. Comparing September 2007 and September 2008, alcohol violations decreased by 56 percent, and drug violations were down 46 percent. These declines occurred in spite of stepped-up enforcement, demonstrating that it was not a case of "students were getting away with more." Anecdotal accounts from community neighbors said the neighborhood was quieter than ever. There were also reductions in self-reported drinking in surveys that



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indicate that setting the tone of responsible socializing early on in the academic year may have longer-term benefits. SDSU Associated Students continued the program for fall 2009 and has already scheduled a free concert for spring 2010.

### **Party Patrols at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee**

Although the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (UWM) does not have the authority to hold students accountable for behavior outside campus, according to the *Milwaukee-Wisconsin Journal Sentinel* (Oct. 27, 2009) campus officials are taking other steps to deal with off-campus alcohol-related problems. UWM pays overtime to Milwaukee Police Department officers to work extra patrols at the beginning of the academic year in order to let returning students know that unruly parties are not acceptable.

When Milwaukee police are called to a party with underage drinking, they can call UWM police, who bring Breathalyzers to test whether students have, indeed, been drinking. If so, the Milwaukee police write tickets for violation of underage drinking laws. The Milwaukee police send names to college administrators of UWM students who are busted for hosting underage drinking parties. The administrators then summon the students for an “intervention,” such as Brief Alcohol Screening and Intervention for College Students (BASICS).

UWM wants to get a campus-based policy approved that would give it authority to punish students for off-campus misconduct, such as endangering others, selling alcohol to minors, or repeat noncriminal violations. But that policy has not yet been approved.

### **Multipronged Approaches**

In 2008, Loyola University New Orleans created Wolfpack Welcome, a series of new alcohol-free events targeted toward first-year students. Wolfpack Welcome is a three-day program where students participate in many of Loyola’s traditions, including Convocation, Class of 2014 Photo, Into the Streets service event, and other events. This program integrates academic and social programming to maximize a successful transition into the community. In its first year, a dance party drew 250 participants. The Late Night in the Danna Student Center drew more than 350 participants.

Rowan University, Glassboro, N.J., pilot tested *Rowan After Hours* (RAH) in spring 2008 on Thursday nights only. The students were so pleased with the late-night programming that they voted to increase their activities fees by \$500,000 per year to support late-night programming on Thursday, Friday, and Saturday nights. The student participation speaks to the effectiveness of RAH. During fall 2008, participation was nearly 10,000 students. This opportunity for an extensive array of late-night, alcohol-free, on-campus activities did not exist prior to the introduction of RAH.

Even minor changes in the first few weeks on campus can have an impact on problems. For example, in fall 2009 Michigan State University (MSU) modified its academic calendar to shorten Fall Welcome from a five-day move-in period to a two-day move-in period. Arrest data comparing fall 2008 and fall 2009 suggest the strategy resulted in far fewer alcohol-related arrests and disturbances both on and off campus. Currently, MSU has no plans to return to a five-day move-in period.

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