

# ED291014 1987-07-00 Alcohol Use among College Students. Highlights: An ERIC/CAPS Digest.

ERIC Development Team

[www.eric.ed.gov](http://www.eric.ed.gov)

## Table of Contents

If you're viewing this document online, you can click any of the topics below to link directly to that section.

[Alcohol Use among College Students. Highlights: An ERIC/CAPS Digest.....](#) 1



**ERIC Identifier:** ED291014

**Publication Date:** 1987-07-00

**Author:** Bolton-Brownlee, Ann

**Source:** ERIC Clearinghouse on Counseling and Personnel Services Ann Arbor MI.

## Alcohol Use among College Students. Highlights: An ERIC/CAPS Digest.

THIS DIGEST WAS CREATED BY ERIC, THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER. FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT ERIC, CONTACT ACCESS ERIC 1-800-LET-ERIC  
TEXT: INTRODUCTION

Students on some college campuses use alcohol to signify their emerging adulthood, to enhance social gatherings, and to cope with stress. As studies have revealed the extent of excessive or problem drinking, however, college administrators have become increasingly concerned about understanding and controlling alcohol use and abuse. In states that have raised the drinking age to 21, college administrators must also consider relevant legal issues. Physical injury and loss of life among students provide additional

compelling reasons to address the problem of excessive drinking (Shore and Rivers, 1985). College personnel need to understand the causes and consequences of problem drinking and tailor educational and counseling programs to the students' needs.

## IDENTIFICATION OF PROBLEM DRINKING

**Negative Consequences.** One way to identify problem drinking is in terms of its negative consequences. At colleges these problems include a reduction in classroom performance, lowered grades, difficulties in residence hall management, and destruction to property (Shore and Rivers, 1985). Administrators believe that alcohol is involved in damage to residence halls, violent behavior, violation of campus policies, physical injuries, and emotional difficulty. Also attributed to alcohol-caused behavior are 29% of academic failures and 21% of students who do not remain in school (Anderson and Gadaletto, 1985). Engs and Hanson (1985) have also found a significant incidence of hangovers, drinking while driving, and missing class because of hangovers.

**Excessive Consumption and Intoxication.** Another way of identifying problem drinking is by the amount and frequency of students' alcohol consumption. One study classified students into four groups based on amount and frequency--abusers, users, weekenders, and socials--and identified behavior differences among the groups (Hetherington and Keene, 1985). Meyer (1986) and Johnston, Bachman, and O'Malley (1986) have shown that although most college students confine their drinking to weekends, they tend to drink heavily on such occasions (five or more drinks in a row). This pattern is increasing among college students at the same time that it is decreasing among their non-college age mates and among high school students (Johnston and others, 1986).

**Reasons for Drinking.** As K. H. Berkowitz and Perkins (1986) have noted, problem drinkers have distinctive motivational patterns and, therefore, drinking for certain kinds of reasons may itself define problem drinking. Some problem drinkers use alcohol to control stress (Beck and Summons, 1985) or to cope with negative affect (Johnston and others, 1986). Studies of DWI (Driving While Intoxicated) offenders indicate that they appear to drink in isolation and for the purpose of coping with stress. Other studies suggest college students drink in a more social atmosphere with the intention of getting drunk. This seems to indicate a more recreational and perhaps experimental approach to alcohol use by the college students (Beck and Summons, 1985). Alcohol educators should be especially sensitive to students who use alcohol as a coping mechanism.

## CORRELATES OF PROBLEM DRINKING

**Personality and Gender.** Compared to nonproblem drinkers, problem drinkers are impulsive, prone to deviant behavior, less oriented toward academic success, more independence-seeking, and more likely to drink for escapist reasons (K. H. Berkowitz and Perkins, 1986). With regard to gender differences, information on the

increase/decrease in use among college women is conflicting. However, the prevalence of heavy drinking remains much greater for males than females (Johnston et al., 1986). Women also show a greater resistance to drinking than do men, except in dormitory living situations (Shore and Rivers, 1985).

Peer, Family, and Environmental Influences. The greatest influence on college students' drinking is their peers. As Shore and Rivers (1985) point out, variables related to influences prior to college, i.e., family, religion and parental alcohol consumption, do not appear to be highly related to RPD (resistance to pressure to drink), but variables within the college environment, such as class standing and living unit, seem to correlate with RPD. Shore and Rivers suggest that perhaps students view college as a "time out" from the "real world," with its own rules and expectations, and look to the college world for guidance and standards. Misperceptions about alcohol use abound, especially among freshmen students. Most students and resident advisors perceive a more liberal norm when a more moderate norm actually exists (A. D. Berkowitz and Perkins, 1986). That is, students have relatively conservative personal attitudes toward drinking, but believe the general attitude to be quite liberal. Misperceptions tend to increase with increasing size of the social group (friends, housing peers, campus at large) and increasing social distance between the group and the perceiver (Perkins and Berkowitz, 1986).

Explanations for increases in drinking or acceptance of problem drinking include broadbased changes in American society--roles of women, alternative life styles, and intergroup relations (Engs and Hanson, 1985). For specific problems, such as the rise in drinking while driving, for example, the causes seem to be complicated. Although studies indicate that raising the legal drinking age contributes to reduced drinking while driving, the legal prohibition against drinking for young adults may make automobiles a "safe" place for them to drink. That is, automobiles may provide a place where under-age students can drink away from school or other authorities. Increased heavy drinking, or drinking rapidly to destroy the evidence, may be a factor in the increase in hangovers and missing class because of hangovers (Engs and Hanson, 1985).

## COUNSELING AND ALCOHOL EDUCATION PROGRAMS

Since many students do not seek out individual counseling, alcohol education coordinators often must rely on other methods of education such as multi-media campaigns, group sessions, and special classes and seminars. Hetherington and Keene (1985) have designed a program based on classifying students by the amount and frequency of their alcohol consumption. The specific methods for counseling each student user group include the following:

**Abusers:** Address psychological issues; stress the emotional impact of large amounts of alcohol; include a discussion of alcohol use and families (children of alcoholics are more likely to be abusive drinkers).

**Weekenders:** Address the relationship between alcohol use and social issues. Include students in organizing campus events; see that such events are nonalcoholic.

**Users:** Address the effects of alcohol use over time and the physiological effects of alcohol; teach bartending for nonalcoholic drinks.

**Socials:** Address students' feelings regarding peer expectations; include a section on assertion skills and information on the role of advertising in creating drinking expectations; discuss social pressure.

Descriptions of effective alcohol policies indicate that prohibiting students from drinking on campus is usually not effective, and that providing guidelines on proper ways of handling drinking situations can help those who choose to drink. Administrators and alcohol education coordinators would be wise to take campus size/organization, student characteristics, and peer influences into account when planning alcohol education programs (Shore and Rivers, 1985).

Typical responses to the alcohol problem by school officials include the following: (1) seeking help from off-campus drug treatment facilities, residence hall staff, and alcohol education coordinators; (2) providing group counseling for students who are problem drinkers; (3) making sanctions more stringent for behavioral infractions that involve alcohol; (4) specifying the conditions under which group activities may involve alcohol; and (5) making advertising standards more stringent (e.g., alcohol cannot be advertised as the primary focus of an event, and off-campus establishments may not run "happy hour" advertisements) (Anderson and Gadaletto, 1985).

Some reports indicate that administrative attention to college students' drinking has resulted in stronger policies concerning student alcohol consumption on campus, increased reporting of alcohol-related problems by campus police or counseling and student health services, and increased alcohol education programming. This heightened emphasis on alcohol-related issues may itself contribute to reported increases in problem drinking, but the fact remains that the problems have always been there and still exist. It is therefore important for all college personnel to address these problems.

#### FOR MORE INFORMATION

Anderson, D. S. and A. F. Gadaletto. "College Alcohol Survey, 1979, 1982, 1985." Athens, OH: Ohio University, 1985. EJ 261 634.

Beck, K. H. and T. G. Summons. "A Comparison of the Social Context for Alcohol Consumption of College Students and Convicted DWI Offenders." JOURNAL OF ALCOHOL AND DRUG EDUCATION 30 (1985): 31-39. EJ 313 367.

Berkowitz, A. D. and H. W. Perkins. "Resident Advisers as Role Models: A Comparison of Drinking Patterns of Resident Advisers and Their Peers." JOURNAL OF COLLEGE

STUDENT PERSONNEL 27 (1986): 146-153. EJ 334 056.

Berkowitz, K. H. and H. W. Perkins. "Problem Drinking Among College Students: A Review of Recent Research." JOURNAL OF AMERICAN COLLEGE HEALTH 35 (1986): 21-28. EJ 342 032.

Engs, R. C. and D. J. Hanson. "The Drinking Patterns and Problems of College Students: 1983." JOURNAL OF ALCOHOL AND DRUG EDUCATION 31 (1985): 65-83. EJ 327 685.

Hetherington, C. and J. M. Keene. "Student Drinking Patterns and Related Alcohol Education Programs." THE JOURNAL OF COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY STUDENT HOUSING 15 (1985): 17-20. EJ 330 930.

Johnston, L. D., J. Bachman, and P. O'Malley. "Drug Use Among American High School Students, College Students, And Other Young Adults. Trends through 1985." Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan, Institute for Social Research, 1986. ED 273 239.

Meyer, T. J. "1 in 3 College Students Tries Cocaine, Study Finds; Bennett Urges President to Crack Down on Drugs." THE CHRONICLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION 32 (1986). EJ 339 083.

Perkins, H. W. and A. D. Berkowitz. "Using Student Alcohol Surveys: Notes On Clinical and Educational Program Applications." JOURNAL OF ALCOHOL AND DRUG EDUCATION 31 (1986): 44-51. EJ 335 597.

Shore, E. R. and P. C. Rivers. "Peer Pressure To Drink: Implications for University Administration and Planning." JOURNAL OF ALCOHOL AND DRUG EDUCATION 30 (1985): 22-31. EJ 323 282.

-----

This publication was prepared with funding from the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education, under OERI contract. The opinions expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect the positions or policies of OERI or the Department of Education.

**Title:** Alcohol Use among College Students. Highlights: An ERIC/CAPS Digest.  
**Document Type:** Information Analyses---ERIC Information Analysis Products (IAPs) (071); Information Analyses---ERIC Digests (Selected) in Full Text (073);  
**Available From:** ERIC/CAPS, 2108 School of Education, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI 48109-1259.  
**Descriptors:** Alcohol Education, College Students, Counseling Techniques, Drinking, Environmental Influences, Family Influence, Higher Education, Identification, Peer

Influence, Personality Traits, Sex Differences, Student Behavior

**Identifiers:** Alcohol Use, ERIC Digests

###

—



[\[Return to ERIC Digest Search Page\]](#)