

Fraternity and Sorority Members and Alcohol and Other Drug Use

The “culture of drinking” on U.S. college campuses has recently gained widespread national attention. A report by the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA) notes the disturbing consequences of drinking on campus each year: 1,700 college student deaths from alcohol-related causes; more than 500,000 unintentional injuries; more than 600,000 assaults; and more than 70,000 cases of sexual assault and acquaintance rape.¹

Fraternities and sororities are among the key groups that foster this culture of drinking on campus.² Their members drink far greater amounts of alcohol, and do so more frequently, than do other students on campus.³ Leaders of fraternities and sororities drink more frequently than other members, setting a norm for heavy drinking.⁴ Students affiliated with such organizations, whether full members or pledges, thus constitute a high-risk population for alcohol abuse and its consequences.^{5,6}

The 2001 Harvard School of Public Health College Alcohol Study (CAS), a national study of college drinking, found that fraternity members were much more likely to engage in heavy drinking than their non-fraternity peers (75.1 percent versus 48.6 percent). Among women, 62.4 percent of sorority members engaged in heavy drinking, compared with 40.9 percent of other female students.³

In the same national study, which surveyed students from 119 colleges and universities, residency in a fraternity or sorority house was associated with even

higher rates of heavy drinking. Fully 75.4 percent of students living in such houses were heavy drinkers, compared with 45.3 percent of students living in non-fraternity residence halls and 35.3 percent of students in substance-free residence halls.³

According to a 1999 study by the Core Institute, fraternity- and sorority-affiliated athletes are especially heavy drinkers. The institute found that 78.3 percent of fraternity and sorority athletes drank heavily during the two weeks prior to the survey, as did 73.8 percent of fraternity and sorority non-athletes.⁶ In contrast, only 54.5 percent of athletes not affiliated with these societies were heavy drinkers. Among non-affiliated students who did not participate in athletics, 39.7 percent drank heavily.⁷

The largest on-campus venue for drinking is the fraternity or sorority house; 32.4 percent of students who drink had attended a party at a fraternity or sorority and 12.5 percent of attendees consumed at least five drinks.³



Consequences of Fraternity and Sorority Alcohol Consumption

Heavy and frequent drinking has a damaging impact on health, safety, and the academic experience, not only for heavy drinkers themselves but also for the entire campus and surrounding community. Because they drink more than other students, fraternity and sorority members are also more likely to suffer alcohol-related consequences.

The Core Institute reported that approximately 50 percent of students living in a fraternity or sorority house performed poorly on a test or project, versus about 25 percent of all students. Approximately 70 percent missed a class, versus about 33 percent of all students. In addition, roughly 59 percent had an argument or fight, compared with 35 percent of all students.⁴

The leaders of fraternities and sororities suffer even greater consequences than other members. One study found that 26.9 percent of fraternity leaders

and 18.6 percent of sorority leaders had suffered an alcohol-related injury. Fully 82.4 percent of fraternity leaders and 78.7 percent of sorority leaders had had a hangover; 71.3 percent of fraternity leaders and 66.2 percent of sorority leaders became nauseated or vomited. In addition, 53.3 percent of fraternity leaders and 45.6 percent of sorority leaders reported having alcohol-related memory loss.⁴

High-risk drinking imposes consequences on other students as well, not just the drinkers themselves. CAS found that 83 percent of residents in a fraternity or sorority house experienced negative consequences due to other students' drinking, such as a serious argument, assault, property damage, having to take care of a drunken student, interrupted study or sleep, an unwanted sexual advance, or sexual assault or acquaintance rape.³

The National College Women Sexual Victimization (NCWSV) study found that 20–25 percent of college women are victims of an attempted or completed rape during their college careers. In 9 out of 10 cases, the victims know the perpetrators. Other studies also suggest that high levels of rape take place at fraternity houses, particularly against sorority women.^{8,9} Sorority members are more likely to be sexually victimized than the general population on campus.⁹



Do Fraternities and Sororities Attract Drinkers or Promote Drinking?

A persistent question for researchers has been whether the social environment of fraternities and sororities somehow fosters alcohol abuse or, alternatively, whether new students who are already heavy drinkers are more likely than others to want to join these societies. A number of studies indicate that both factors are involved in producing the high rates of alcohol consumption among fraternity and sorority members.⁵

Researchers at the University of Alabama found

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that members of fraternities and sororities increased their drinking more than other students after beginning college. Nearly 40 percent of fraternity members who had been low-level drinkers (defined as having three or fewer drinks in a sitting) in high school became high-level drinkers (defined as having four or more drinks in a sitting) in college. In comparison, only 17 percent of male students not in fraternities showed a similar rise in drinking from high school to college. For women, the pattern is even more pronounced. Among women who were low-level drinkers in high school, sorority members were three times more likely than non-members to become high-level drinkers in college (33 percent versus 11 percent).¹⁰

A study of new students at the University of Virginia found that those who intended to join fraternities or sororities were about twice as likely as their peers to be frequent heavy drinkers (defined as men who have five or more drinks in a row, and as women who have three or more drinks in a row, more than once in the previous two weeks). For men, nearly 70 percent of those planning to pledge a fraternity were frequent heavy drinkers, compared with just over 30 percent of those not pledging. For women, the disparity in frequent heavy drinking between those pledging and those not intending to join a sorority was about 52 percent to 23 percent.¹⁰ Other studies have found similar associations between heavy drinking and intention to join these societies.⁵

The 1996 CAS found that while 34 percent of non-fraternity men were heavy drinkers in high school, almost double that proportion (60 percent) of men living in fraternity houses had been heavy drinkers in high school. Among non-resident fraternity members, 44 percent were heavy drinkers in high school. For women the differences were not as stark. Among sorority members, regardless of residency, 35 percent were heavy drinkers in high school, while 28 percent of non-members were.¹²

The same nationwide survey found that among both fraternity and sorority residents, about 75 percent of those who were not heavy drinkers in high school became heavy drinkers in college. Among non-residents, 61 percent of fraternity members and 48

percent of sorority members who did not drink heavily in high school became heavy drinkers in college. And for students who were not involved in these organizations, 32 percent of men and 25 percent of women became heavy drinkers after beginning college.¹²



Strategies for Institutions of Higher Education

Large, national studies show that new students who are heavy drinkers are attracted to fraternities and sororities and perceive that campus subculture to be supportive of heavy drinking.^{13,14} Some experts argue that these societies serve as “enablers” for students with drinking problems.^{13,16} Given the high rates of heavy drinking in fraternities and sororities and the role they take in promoting frequent and heavy alcohol consumption on campus, college and university prevention efforts should target these social societies.¹⁴ Changing the availability of alcohol in the environment will be more easily achieved with the cooperation of fraternity and sorority leadership.

College and university prevention specialists should implement the following five environmental strategies to reduce frequent and heavy drinking in fraternities and sororities:

Promoting Alcohol- and Drug-Free Social, Recreational, and Extracurricular Options and Public Service

- Create rituals and traditions that promote brotherhood and sisterhood without the use of alcohol and other drugs.
- Sponsor and promote alcohol-free activities that promote bonding among fraternity and sorority members, such as community service and volunteer opportunities, leadership development activities, retreats, and social events.
- Sponsor alcohol- and other drug-free social and recreational options for students on the entire campus, such as a student center, coffeehouse, or other alcohol-free settings. Marketing efforts for these events must clearly outline the alcohol- and drug-free guidelines for the activities.

Creating a Social, Academic, and Residential Environment That Promotes Healthy Social Norms

- Encourage chapters to establish alcohol-free fraternity and sorority houses.
- Screen pledges for problem drinking and offer counseling and treatment to members when needed.
- Implement workshops at fraternities and sororities to help chapters reassess alcohol and other drug social norms.
- Develop social norms marketing campaigns for fraternities and sororities to address exaggerated misperceptions of alcohol and other drug abuse.
- Offer money to refurbish fraternity and sorority houses in exchange for a live-in adviser.
- Make academic achievement a central component of fraternity and sorority life, and include it in the recruitment process.
- Establish mentoring and tutoring programs between senior members and new pledges to improve academic standards and ease the adjustment to campus life.
- Promote academic competitions among fraternities and sororities, such as contests of the chapter with the highest cumulative GPA.

Limiting Alcohol Availability and Access

- Prohibit alcohol from being used during rush/recruitment week at fraternities and sororities.
- Prohibit alcohol use in public places.
- Prohibit delivery or use of kegs or other common containers on campus.
- Establish, monitor, and enforce guidelines for off-campus parties.
- Require alcohol servers at fraternity and sorority houses to be registered and trained.
- Require parties at fraternities and sororities to have security monitors, who must remain sober.

- Require and promote keg registration.
- Prohibit fraternity and sorority houses from having beer taps.

Limiting Marketing and Promotion of Alcohol

- Restrict alcohol advertising on campus and in campus publications.
- Prohibit fraternities and sororities from promoting parties through posted notices, painted bed sheets, house Web sites, and newspaper ads.
- Prohibit alcohol industry–sponsored events or promotions by fraternities and sororities.

Enforcing Campus Policy and State and Local Laws

- Prohibit rush among new students during their first semester.
- Communicate campus alcohol and other drug policies clearly and frequently to the community, including possible consequences for violations.
- Require registration of on-campus functions.
- Enforce ID checks at on-campus functions.
- Use undercover operations at fraternity and sorority houses and other on- and off-campus functions to enforce alcohol rules and laws.
- Use patrols to observe on-campus and off-campus parties.
- Advocate enforcement of ID checks at off-campus bars and liquor stores.
- Use noise ordinances, building inspection codes, and other local ordinances to crack down on houses that are causing neighborhood disturbances.
- Educate fraternities and sororities about potential legal liability.

Extensive changes to the campus environment will reduce heavy drinking and foster a healthier and safer campus community. Changing the campus environment, more formally known as *environmental management*, is grounded in the idea that the physical, social, legal, and economic environment on and around campus fosters student drinking; by changing that environment, fewer students will use alcohol and other drugs.

For more information about environmental strategies for alcohol and other drug prevention, see

the Higher Education Center's publication *Environmental Management: A Comprehensive Strategy for Reducing Alcohol and Other Drug Use on College Campuses*, available on the Center's Web site, www.higheredcenter.org.



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RESOURCES

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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.

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.



Other Organizations

BACCHUS and GAMMA Peer Education Network

<http://www.bacchusgamma.org>; 303-871-0901

BACCHUS (Boosting Alcohol Consciousness Concerning the Health of University Students) and GAMMA (Greeks Advocating Mature Management of Alcohol) is an international association of college- and university-based peer education programs focused on alcohol abuse prevention, sexual assault prevention, and other student health issues. The group provides training, technical assistance, educational materials, and national and regional forums to support campus peer educators and offers specialized materials for use with fraternity and sorority chapters. BACCHUS and GAMMA has more than 700 campus chapters and 25,000 active members around the country. The organization receives funding from the alcohol industry.

BACCHUS and GAMMA has developed the Certified Peer Educator Training Program, a comprehensive 13-hour training for peer educators, residence hall staff, and fraternity and sorority leaders to help them develop the skills necessary to lead workshops on substance abuse prevention and other topics related to student health. The training also includes an instructional video, a facilitator's manual, and student workbooks.

The *GAMMA Guide* describes more than 40 programs tailored to help fraternities and sororities address problems with alcohol use. The video "The Heart of the Matter" targets sororities. "In Our Own Defense," a video that explores difficulties in confronting sexual assault, is designed for both fraternity and sorority leaders. Each video comes with a facilitator's guide. BACCHUS and GAMMA also distributes many other resource books, pamphlets, videos, and posters.

National Panhellenic Conference

<http://www.npcwomen.org>; 317-872-3185

National Panhellenic Conference (NPC) represents 26 national and international sororities on more than 600 college campuses. Through the program

Something of Value, NPC representatives travel to campuses across the country to educate students about risky behaviors. Chapter officers, members, and advisors spend a weekend talking about their values, risky behaviors that contradict those values, risk avoidance, and confrontation skills. Working together, they create a plan for sorority women to implement in order to provide the best possible environment in which to live. Issues often discussed during the Something of Value Program are drug and alcohol use and abuse, sexual assault, date rape, eating disorders, and hazing. NPC and NIC are collaborating on the Substance-Free Housing Task Force to develop a model for a systemwide substance-free housing initiative for sororities and fraternities. Housing of the 26 NPC groups has always been substance free, yet this initiative is an opportunity for the men and women to work together to provide an opportunity for all members to live in a positive and safe environment.

North-American Interfraternity Conference

<http://www.nicindy.org>; 317-872-1112

North-American Interfraternity Conference (NIC) represents over 65 member fraternities on more than 800 college campuses. The organization provides resources and services to member fraternities and colleges on a range of topics of interest, including substance abuse prevention and sexual assault prevention. Although NIC represents fraternities only, some of its educational material is also appropriate for sororities.

NIC's Our Chapter/Our Choice Program, a peer-led workshop developed by Dr. Jeff Linkenbach, is designed to help fraternity chapters reassess alcohol and other drug norms. NIC offers training for peer facilitators, a workshop implementation manual, and support materials. The organization also distributes educational materials on sexual assault prevention and substance abuse prevention, including a manual on risk management. The Theme Party Kit, published in three editions, offers more than 100 ideas for creative substance-free social programs.