



The U.S. Department of Education's

**HIGHER
EDUCATION
CENTER**

for Alcohol,
Drug Abuse, and
Violence Prevention

PREVENTION UPDATE

Changing Policies on Campus

Overview

[*High-Risk Drinking in College: What We Know and What We Need To Learn: Final Report of the Panel on Contexts and Consequences*](#) (2002), a report from the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism's (NIAAA) Task Force on College Drinking, points out that "federal, state, and local laws help define college administrators' responsibilities for taking action when students misuse alcohol." Among other requirements, the federal *Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act* and its 1989 amendments require institutions receiving any federal funds to define a policy that prohibits the unlawful possession, use, and distribution of alcohol and other drugs (AOD); adopt disciplinary sanctions for students and employees who violate the school's policy on alcohol and drugs; and ensure that the disciplinary sanctions are consistently enforced.

One of the five areas of focus of the [environmental management model](#) articulated by the U.S. Department of Education's Higher Education Center for Alcohol, Drug Abuse, and Violence Prevention is the development and enforcement of campus policies and enforcement of laws to address high-risk and illegal AOD abuse and violence. "Every campus should, therefore, have institutionwide programs and policies that address AOD use. The first step in developing such policies is to review what policies already exist on campus. It is helpful to involve many different stakeholders, including senior administrators, campus police, students, faculty, and staff, in this process. If policies are vague or gaps exist, it is essential to strengthen or rewrite them so that students, faculty, and staff know exactly what is expected of them. Some policies that are effective in reducing alcohol and other drug abuse on campus include banning kegs, prohibiting drinking games, enforcing sanctions for AOD policy violators, and requiring that nonalcoholic beverages and food be made available at all campus events."

In addition, the "opportunity to create a safe environment for students isn't confined to campus alone. Administrators can work with local police and government personnel to be sure community policies are clear, reasonable, consistently enforced, and reflect the values of the community and campus. For instance, local police can work with bar owners to crack down on fake IDs, stop having happy hours, and enforce laws prohibiting the sale of alcohol to minors. Working together, campus and community representatives can increase patrols in the neighborhoods surrounding campus to break up loud parties and discourage vandalism."

The NIAAA Task Force on College Drinking's Panel on Contexts and Consequences [recommends](#) that colleges and universities "[r]eview policy and its implementation continually and update and/or expand it as needed" and "[r]eview the scope of disciplinary sanctions associated with policy violations for appropriateness and for consistency of enforcement."

What the Evidence Tells Us

In the study "[What We Have Learned From the Harvard School of Public Health College Alcohol Study: Focusing Attention on College Student Alcohol Consumption and the Environmental Conditions That Promote It](#)," the researchers found that campus, local, and state alcohol control policies are associated with less drinking and binge drinking among college students. In another study, "[Alcohol Policy Enforcement and Changes in Student Drinking Rates in a Statewide Public College System: A Follow-up Study](#)," the researchers concluded, "Study findings suggest that stronger enforcement of a stricter alcohol policy may be



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associated with reductions in student heavy drinking rates over time. An aggressive enforcement stance by deans may be an important element of an effective college alcohol policy.” In addition they said, “Our study found that current (i.e., past 30 days) drinking rates and heavy drinking behavior among drinkers declined significantly during a period of increased restrictions on alcohol at Massachusetts public colleges and universities. While the great majority of students continued to report some drinking, study results suggest that *heavy* drinking may have declined, particularly among underage students and on-campus residents, for whom the school's alcohol policy may have greater impact.” The study also found no evidence of a rise in marijuana use as a possible unintended consequence of stricter alcohol policy enforcement. Of the 11 surveyed Massachusetts public colleges and universities, the greatest declines in alcohol cases occurred in schools with the strictest enforcement, which may include checking bags and identification at parties and searching rooms for liquor.

“Policies can only work if they are sufficiently enforced,” said Sion Kim Harris, of the Center for Adolescent Substance Abuse Research (CeASAR) at Children's Hospital Boston, and the study's first author, in a [press release](#). “Our study adds to a growing body of evidence that alcohol control policies and strong policy enforcement can, over time, reduce underage high-risk drinking behaviors. We found that an aggressive enforcement stance by college leaders is particularly important to the success of these efforts.”

Lessons Learned From Colleges and Universities

According to [Penn State Live](#), since fall 2010 the university has implemented a number of initiatives to address high-risk drinking using a multipronged approach that includes environmental change, enforcement, alternative activities, intervention, counseling, and outreach.

“ ‘Over the last decade, we have invested an enormous amount of effort into programs that both educate about and offer alternatives to drinking,’ said Damon Sims, vice president for Student Affairs. ‘In analyzing our efforts, we have been able to draw a number of conclusions about what has had an impact and what more we might do to increase our students’ awareness of the issue and the problems we all face when drinking is taken to the extreme.’ ”

Penn State has adopted stricter consequences to illegal drinking behaviors, such as increased attention to enforcement and serious consequences to students who violate the community’s laws and the university's student conduct policies. It has increased judicial affairs sanctions so that all off-campus underage possession or consumption charges brought against Penn students are processed through the university disciplinary system. Sanctions have been adjusted to increase minimum penalties in most cases involving alcohol, and the consequences for re-offenders have increased as well.

Higher Education Center Resources

- **Publications**
 - [Complying With the Drug-Free Schools and Campuses Regulations \[EDGAR Part 86\]: A Guide for University and College Administrators](#) (2006)
 - [Catalyst](#) (Winter 2007) Vol. 8 No. 2: Law Enforcement
 - [The Role of State, Community, and Institutional Policy in the Prevention of College Alcohol Problems](#) (2004)
- **Case Studies:** [University of Florida](#); [University of Tennessee](#)
- **Web Page:** [Developing Campus Policies and Enforcing Laws](#)

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