

A national survey conducted in 2014 found that nearly 60% of college students age 18-22 drank alcohol in the past month, and nearly two thirds of them had been binge drinking. Therefore, roughly 40% of young adults in college are binge drinking¹. The deleterious effects these students will face as a result are countless: from the direct and obvious consequences such as alcohol-related motor-vehicle crashes, assaults, and sexual abuses, to the long-term consequences like substance abuse disorder, poor academic performance, and the many damaging health effects of excessive alcohol consumption such as heart disease, liver disease, and cancer². Yet despite its many negative effects, high school students look forward to college as a time to drink and party, "*because after all, it's college,*" and end up caught amidst the waves of like-minded individuals. The notion of not getting wasted at parties becomes inconceivable, and the unfortunate consequence of this is that about 20 percent of college students have an alcohol use disorder¹.

But why does this happen, and why does it seem like little to nothing is being done to address this? The answer to both questions is the same: the main approach currently being taken by colleges to combat this issue, creating information campaigns, does nothing to address the root causes of college drinking. These reasons include the fact that half of college binge drinkers were binge drinkers before college, that alcohol is deeply rooted in Greek life as well as traditions like football tailgate parties, that bars in the area often offer discounts to college students and fight to protect their right to do so, and that colleges often have lax enforcement policies against their students engaging in underage and reckless drinking³. Most significant, however, is pop culture's attitude towards higher education. College is seen as a time of freedom and independence, and this plays into student alcoholism in two ways. First, the students see

partying as a way of expressing their liberty; they no longer have parents judging their actions, and so they want to “live in the moment” as a way to rebel and feel independent. They see drinking in college as a fundamental right as young adults, and protest attempts colleges make to curb drinking as oppressive and totalitarian. Second, colleges and parents want to view their students as responsible adults who can make good decisions, and in order to do so typically avoid trying to police students with harsh enforcement policies. Thus, even though mass-surveys have consistently shown that students would drink less if the penalties for underage or reckless drinking were increased and enforced, fewer than half of colleges consistently enforce their alcohol policies³. They instead take the approach of trying to merely educate students about the dangers of binge drinking, a method which has proven a failure over the past couple of decades as drinking rates in college rise higher..

As a high school senior at a college-preparatory school, I have witnessed these attitudes towards drinking first-hand. When my peers discuss what life will be like in college, they do not talk about the rigorous academics, one-on-one mentoring, or impressive class selections. Instead, they talk about finding the right social crowds to get into parties, being of legal age, and living up their freshman year. As someone who does not drink and has no plans to drink in college, it strikes me as sad. Many of these students excelled academically up until their senior year, when they became swept into the formerl- mentioned large percentage of students who binge drink before high school by peer pressure. They have been hyped up to believe that college is the time to have the greatest parties of their lives, in spite of the fact that approximately 1,825 college students die from alcohol-related incidents each year and that 696,000 more are assaulted by a student who has been drinking¹. Sure, they think they will be able to balance school and partying

and come out with a degree and career, yet one in four of all college students report academic problems from drinking. After excluding the students who do not drink, the number becomes roughly two-fifths of students who drink stating that it harms them academically. And yet this is only the number who are willing to admit to themselves that they have a problem. With binge drinking in college so normalized, many heavy drinkers refuse to even consider the possibility that their actions could haunt them for the rest of their lives. They believe that they can spend four years of their lives as functional alcoholics and then move on to a completely happy and healthy life, yet this is not so. Alcohol is an addictive drug like any other, and far more so when it is abused. It is just not possible to live as an addict for years and then simply turn a new leaf as soon as college is over. Even if students are able to stop drinking afterwards, they will continue to live with the systematic and neurological consequences of their previous habits. Thus, colleges must become aggressive with their anti-drinking policies. Only by letting their student bodies know that they truly will not tolerate alcohol abuse in their communities can they work towards eliminating pop culture's vision of college as a time to party and go wild. In doing so, they would protect the health of their students, and work towards ending the public health crisis of college binge drinking.

Works Cited

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