

# Focus

THE CHRONICLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

# Alcohol's Influence on Campus



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you receive premium, unrestricted access to the entire Chronicle Focus collection. Curated by our newsroom, these booklets compile the most popular and relevant higher-education news to provide you with in-depth looks at topics affecting campuses today. The Chronicle Focus collection explores student alcohol abuse, racial tension on campuses, and other emerging trends that have a significant impact on higher education.

**O**NE OF THE LESSONS many students seem to learn at college, and that some of them carry over into their alumni years, is how to drink to excess. Several negative outcomes appear to be linked to that behavior: illness, sexual assault, accidental death, even murder. This collection delves into why this problem that has long afflicted college campuses does not seem to be getting any closer to being resolved.

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**Cover photo of students tailgating at the U. of Maryland at College Park by Greg Kahn**



TAMIKA MOORE FOR THE CHRONICLE

# A River of Booze

Inside one college town's uneasy embrace of drinking

By **KARIN FISCHER** and **ERIC HOOVER**

**T**HE SUPPLIES are rolling in. At 1 p.m. on a Thursday, three delivery trucks line College Avenue. Around the corner, five more clog East Clayton Street. In downtown Athens, the center lane belongs to those who bring the booze.

Out come the boxes. Budweiser and Blue Moon, Bacardi Gold and Southern Comfort, Red Bull and rainbows of mixers. Stacked high on dollies, the goods are wheeled into bar after bar, each catering to students at the University of Georgia, where the iconic iron Arch stands within sight. Cutters

ATHENS, GA.

Pub, On the Rocks, the Whiskey Bent. The blocks just beyond campus boast dozens of bars that own the late-night hours, when undergrads press themselves into crowds fueled by Fireball shots and beer as cheap as candy.

Athens, home to the flagship university and some 120,000 people, could be almost anywhere. This college town, like many others, celebrates touchdowns, serves early-morning cheeseburgers, and pours many flavors of vodka. When the sun goes down, some students get hammered, just as they do in Chapel Hill, Ann Arbor, and Eugene.

But here in Athens, everything is amplified. The

temptations for young drinkers are plentiful, and the penalties can be severe. Enforcement is vigorous, and so, too, is the university's commitment to prevention. Alcohol is a big business in town, with costs and benefits. Each bottle delivered on the eve of another weekend represents a love-hate affair, an abiding ambivalence about drinking.

It's an uneasy equilibrium, with competing interests. There are determined police officers and resourceful entrepreneurs, business owners and health educators, students who reject drinking and alumni who embrace it.

As alcohol keeps flowing, each one has something at stake. Each one has a hand on the valve.

**T**HE student is lying on a public bench, at the end of a trail of vomit. He is unconscious; his front pocket gapes, a wallet falling partway out. An officer shakes him, and again, finally rousing him. "How much," the officer demands, "have you had to drink?"

The student blinks unsteadily. "Zero zero?" he mumbles, though a Breathalyzer test will confirm otherwise. He's going to jail.

Jimmy Williamson, chief of the University of Georgia's campus police force, turns away from the grainy footage, recorded by the officer's body camera. "I can't just leave him on a bench with a citation in his pocket," Mr. Williamson says of the student. "A citation's not going to sober him up."

Mr. Williamson's no teetotaler, but he didn't have much time for carousing when he was a Georgia student. He put himself through college by working the midnight shift on the same police force. Now 48, he has spent nearly his entire career here, the past 10 as chief. He and his 90 officers, along with 240 from Athens-Clarke County, are the front line in dealing with alcohol and its immediate aftermath.

College students drink, always have. But Mr. Williamson argues that the problem of overconsumption has worsened. Average blood-alcohol levels in students stopped by the police have risen steadily—this year one blew a 0.33, more than four times the legal limit. With heavier drinking, the police now make drunk-driving arrests in midmorning, pulling over students on their way to class still intoxicated from the night before. "As a culture, we've supersized," Mr. Williamson says. "And we've taken it into our drinking."

He worries about the risks, about inebriated students becoming victims of sexual assault or other crimes. Corrections officials have passed along letters intercepted from inmates, boasting about robbing easy marks in downtown Athens. The police chief also fears that students will harm themselves or others.

Not long after midnight on a recent Friday, a call comes over the radio: A student has tripped and fallen after a night out and hit her head. Officers

arrive to find Jacqueline, a 19-year-old with long, honey-colored hair, stretched out on the cold slab of a bus stop, surrounded by concerned friends. After falling she was unresponsive, for maybe 30 seconds, maybe a minute or two—no one seems quite clear. Long enough to prompt a call to 911. Now an egg-shaped welt has begun to swell next to her right eye, and her speech is slurred. Asked who is the president of the United States, she names her sorority president.

The paramedics arrive, and after some tears, Jacqueline is trundled off on a stretcher. Under Georgia's medical-amnesty law, minors who seek help for themselves or their friends after drinking too much aren't prosecuted.

For others it's a different story. Get caught drinking underage in Athens, and you've guaranteed yourself a night in jail. To deter bad behavior, the police here have followed a no-strikes policy for nearly a decade. The approach is stricter than that in many other college towns, or in other Georgia municipalities.

Lest you think that means zero tolerance for drinking, well, think again. That group of students stumbling out of a bar at closing time? Sure, one officer says, the dorms in that direction house freshmen and sophomores only. But although a couple of the students are swaying, and one is riding on another's shoulders, he lets them pass. Though they are almost assuredly underage, they are heading home safely.

Talk to Georgia students, and they tick off unwritten rules of drinking downtown, passed down each year to newcomers: Don't step onto the sidewalk with an open container. No jaywalking. Never, ever get behind the wheel.

The police don't do random ID checks, says Mr. Williamson, or stop everyone with a drink in hand. They deal only with the worst and worst-off. Those who pass out on a bench or in the bushes. Who play a real-life game of Frogger, dodging and darting into oncoming traffic. Who dress up as Santa Claus and try to break into a women's residence hall.

Together, campus and local police officers log 900 to 1,000 underage-drinking arrests a year. That's about three a night, Mr. Williamson points out, a small percentage of the thousands of students who pack downtown bars. He's not trying to run a police state or mandate a dry campus. "We're public servants with enforcement powers," he says, "not an occupying force."

Even so, the chief regularly fields complaints from parents, unhappy that he has locked up their kids and dismayed that they will have an arrest record. After he was called in several years ago by members of the university's parents council, an influential group, he started requiring his officers to wear cameras. Now if parents complain, he offers to show them the arrest footage.

Even going to the tape, though, is not always

enough. The mother of the guy in the Santa suit maintained that the police should've taken her son, who eventually passed out, back to his room, not to jail. Recounting the story, Mr. Williamson looks momentarily exasperated. He tried to explain, he says, that her son was safer sleeping off his drunkenness under supervision.

Not only does the chief find himself second-guessed, but he believes he's inherited a problem. Today's freshmen arrive on campus as habitual drinkers, he says. Too many parents have failed to talk to their children about responsible alcohol use. They've looked the other way. They've dismissed binge drinking and other risky behavior with, "Kids will be kids."

Mr. Williamson is the father of two, Sarah, 12, and Mac, 10. His children, he knows, might drink in college, maybe even high school, but he's not about to tell them it's OK. Asked if it's hypocritical to take such a stance when he had at least an occasional beer during his college days, he responds, "Did you tell your kids about Santa Claus and the

year about the consequences of drinking too much. He hopes he gets through to a few, but he's realistic about succeeding when parents seemingly cannot. "How can I do something in five minutes," he says, "that they couldn't do in 18 years?"

Unless students are raised to see drinking differently, Mr. Williamson says, he and his officers can treat only the symptoms, not the heart of the problem. They'll just go on trying to keep students safe for another night.

THAT leaves the Athens police no shortage of work to do: patrolling outside bars, conducting late-night traffic stops, and busting what might have been the largest fake-ID ring run from a college campus.

Police believe the ring supplied as many as 1,000 students with fraudulent identification, its cards ending up as far away as Mississippi and Illinois. The kingpin was a University of Georgia student named William Finley Trosclair.

At Georgia, a fake ID is pretty much a necessity for anyone under 21 who wants to drink. For many incoming students, procuring one is a standard part of their introduction to college, like getting their roommate assignment and class schedule. The drinking culture here is different than on many other campuses, centered less on house parties and more on the mass of downtown bars. Whether you start the night at a frat party or pregameing in a dorm room, everyone, students say, ends up downtown. For most underclassmen, that means a fake ID.

Mr. Trosclair was no different. He got an ID, not a very good one, from a fraternity brother his freshman year. When he tried to use it at a liquor store, it was confiscated. Later that night, he was caught trying to slip into a bar. He was arrested and sentenced to com-

munity service.

While serving his 20 hours, he met a fellow student with a fledgling fake-ID business. The two became friends and, eventually, partners, with Mr. Trosclair using his student-loan money to help purchase a printer that could produce high-quality forgeries. He made back his loan money and more in three days.

Mr. Trosclair is 23 now, and still baby-faced. He didn't set out to be the center of a crime ring, he says. He just wanted some spending money, and an ID for himself. Selling a few, he figured, would help



TAMIKA MOORE FOR THE CHRONICLE

Police officers in Athens don't do random ID checks or stop everyone with a drink in hand. They deal only with the worst offenders and the worst-off, like those who pass out in public.

Easter Bunny? Sometimes you do what's expedient, and when they get to be old enough, you talk about the truth." Now that high school isn't far off, he's had conversations with his daughter about what to do if she's pressured to drink. *Take a beer and empty it into the toilet*, he tells her. *No one will know if you refill the bottle with water.*

The police chief talks with other parents' children, too. Between lectures to fraternities and sororities, to sports teams and student groups, and in 17 freshman-orientation sessions, Mr. Williamson tells thousands of University of Georgia students a

him cover his fraternity dues, \$1,500 a semester, and put some cash in his pocket when he headed downtown.

The IDs that Mr. Trosclair sold were high-quality, with Florida driver's-license holograms—bought off the Internet from a guy in China—that seemed real. Soon everybody was clamoring for one, at \$80 to \$100. Mr. Trosclair recruited a sales force of sorts, offering students a free ID if they sold 10 to their friends. “I’m a pretty good businessman,” he says, “and I had a good product.” He sat back and collected the cash.

For a college sophomore, it was heady stuff. “It was addicting, the money and the status that came from that,” he says. Talking with a girl was easy, he recalls, when you could buy shots for her and all her friends. Police say Mr. Trosclair and his partner made a six-figure income from the IDs. He says he doesn’t know the exact amount; he spent it.

His success became his undoing. One of his salespeople had a roommate who, afraid she might get in trouble, went to her resident assistant. The police began tracking down Mr. Trosclair’s IDs, waiving charges against students who signed statements against him. One night they raided his partner’s apartment, breaking down the door with a battering ram. Later they searched Mr. Trosclair’s fraternity house. The case took nearly two years to build, but he was eventually charged with 16 felony counts of making and distributing fake IDs. In his mug shot he’s smiling—he thought people would see him as a “harmless kid.” Instead, many thought he was smug and unremorseful.

Mr. Trosclair has had time to reflect. After fighting the charges, he took a plea deal. Last fall he went to prison, serving 10 weeks. He missed Thanksgiving and Christmas; his mother had surgery while he was behind bars. Some people are still mad at him, others don’t trust him. In his wallet he keeps his faded ID card from the Georgia Department of Corrections. In the photo, his head, like all prisoners’, is shaved. “To remind me not to be an idiot,” he says, and tucks it away.

Still, he retains some pride in what he did, noting more than once that at the height of his ring, the University of Georgia was named the country’s top party school. As he sees it, he was providing a service, and if he hadn’t, someone else would have. “Kids are always going to drink. They are going to get into a bar anyway,” he says. “It’s weird to say, but I don’t know if what I did had much impact.”

Indeed, there’s little sign that shutting down Mr. Trosclair hurt the fake-ID market. Not far from downtown, at the Five Points Bottle Shop, employees regularly confiscate phonies. A collection once hung above the cash register, but the wall of shame failed to deter people. Now hundreds of cards sit in small plastic bags behind the counter. Some are

homemade disasters, with crooked type and fuzzy photographs. One is a bad photocopy job pasted onto a McDonald’s gift card.

Mr. Trosclair is back in Athens, trying to get readmitted to Georgia to finish his chemistry degree. He also dreams of making it in country music; he’s recording a five-song EP. His lyrics are mostly about budding romances and lost loves, he says, not his criminal past.

**“Kids are always going to drink. They are going to get into a bar anyway. It’s weird to say, but I don’t know if what I did had much impact.”**

When he was selling IDs, Mr. Trosclair used to imagine what would happen if he got caught. Part of him, he says, believed that the police might tell him to go on making them. That way officers could keep busting and fining students for underage drinking. The bars could keep selling beer and shots. Athens could collect taxes on it all. “This is an alcohol-based city,” he says. “The place runs on it.”

**E**VERYONE knows Mark Bell. “I provide the party,” he says. “I put smiles on people’s faces.”

He also puts money in the till. Long after most businesses have closed, downtown bars keep Athens’s cash registers ringing well past midnight. Mr. Bell owns 9d’s, a popular 1990s-themed club where people dance to the Spice Girls beneath the addled gaze of Cosmo Kramer. Each time someone orders a rum and Coke, Athens-Clarke County collects seven cents on the dollar, plus a 3-cent mixed-drink excise tax, on top of the 22-cent tax on the sale of the liquor bottle. A good night at 9d’s is a good night for the local economy.

On a Friday afternoon, Mr. Bell strolls through town in a black Batman cap and wraparound shades. He stops to shake hands with a county police lieutenant. At a crosswalk, he chats with a local lawmaker.

Bar owners have clout here, and it's easy to see why. The place is loaded with bars, more than 50 in a few square blocks. Nearly half of the approximately 220 storefronts downtown are occupied by businesses with alcohol licenses. The Frigidaire Building is now home to Magnolias Bar. An old bank is now the Silver Dollar Bar. The *Athens Observer* building? There's a bar there, too.

The story of how Athens became a big booze town is complicated, but the simple version goes like this: During the 1980s, many downtown businesses closed, and department stores relocated to a suburban shopping mall. Only a handful of bars were downtown when the university, in response to alcohol problems on the campus, got tough on drinking in the Greek system. The new rules, including a ban on kegs, pushed students into local watering holes.

At the time, some Athens officials worried that more businesses would flee to the 'burbs. So they didn't cap the number of bars and restaurants that could open downtown, where a fast-growing music scene also drove demand for late-night drinks. After a decade or so, there were dozens of places to buy a beer or a bourbon just off campus.

Over the years, Athens officials have scrutinized alcohol policies, but bar owners often win. Athens-Clarke commissioners have scrapped proposals to require background checks for bouncers, to set the minimum age to work in a bar at 21, and to end happy-hour specials.

Now and then, there's talk of limiting the number of bars in Athens. "We are the red-headed stepchild, but they've got to be reminded not to smack the one hand that feeds them," Mr. Bell says of local leaders who have criticized bars. "They hate that we're here, but they love the money."

In this crowded quarter, bars vie relentlessly for students' business. Mr. Bell loves the fall, when undergrads with prepaid credit cards return to Athens, when football games fill local hotels with thirsty fans. On those weekends, he puts four bartenders on duty. "I treat it like Disney World," he says. "The crowds are here, they've got their wallets out, and you've got to be ready for them to give it to you."

But competition has driven prices down. During "power hours," typically 9-11 p.m., students can drink discounted cocktails for \$2 or \$3. Since so many bars charge similar prices, some try to lure students with potent drinks. (Whiskey Bent touts the Cannonball, featuring Bacardi 151 and "four other liquors" for \$3.) A local ordinance sets the minimum prices for drinks at \$1.

Some venues, students and police say, have used social media or word of mouth to advertise forbidden drink specials: penny beers, free drinks for women. That's why, all of a sudden, students checking smartphones might flee one bar and flock to another.

In the late-night realm of fast-flying cash, Mr. Bell must weigh his interest in profit against the whims of customers, more and more of whom, he says, seek the cheapest booze they can find. The least expensive drinks at 9d's are \$2. He refuses to go lower.

To survive, Mr. Bell believes, a bar needs a niche. Sure, some students don't like General Beauregard's, with its Confederate flags, but those who do swear by the Dixieland Tea, spiked with bourbon. 9d's was meant to cut across patrons' cultural lines: "I'm banking on their memories," he says.

While memories get people in the door, Mr. Bell depends on markups: He has to pay a dozen or so employees and \$4,300 a month in rent. A bottle of Budweiser sets him back about 60 cents, and he charges \$2 to \$3 for it. A 1.75-liter bottle of Fireball Cinnamon Whisky, which goes for \$26.99 in Athens, contains roughly 39 1.5-ounce shots, which typically sell for \$2 or \$3 each. If he buys several cases at a time, he gets a big discount, he says. "That is where the money is."

The allure of owning a bar he can describe in three words: "In no particular order, money, ego, girls." He's a local guy whose great-grandfather opened a grocery store here that's still going strong. Although Mr. Bell could have joined the family business, he fell for the hum of speakers, the swirl of dance floors. At 9d's, he can take over the DJ booth whenever he wants.

Still, Mr. Bell, 42, isn't sure how long he wants to own a bar, with its many worries. A big one: students' fake IDs. Athens police officers run frequent undercover operations, enlisting teenagers to nail bouncers who let them in and bartenders who serve them. 9d's has been cited once—a mistake by a doorman, says Mr. Bell, who paid a \$500 fine. Over the past 20 years, local officials say, just one bar has lost its liquor license because of underage-drinking violations.

Running a business on booze takes a toll, says Mr. Bell. In the doorway of an abandoned building, he picks up the green shard of a broken beer bottle and drops it in a trash can. "It's a business of excess," he says. "It's made me jaded in some ways, to see the best and worst in people."

Over the years, many bars have come and gone, one semester's hot spot turning cold the next. This past May, Mr. Bell reluctantly closed 8e's, his 1980s club, where traffic had slowed after eight years, its novelty wearing off, its regulars growing older.

But 9d's still draws a crowd, young and giddy. Past 1 a.m., long after Mr. Bell has gone home, the club bursts with students dancing to Lou Bega's "Mambo No. 5," drinking \$2 well drinks, in a large room where movie posters—*Pulp Fiction*, *Jurassic Park*—plaster the walls. When the music stops and the lights go on, the bleary and the buzzed, some singing, file out peacefully enough. A woozy young man slumps against the wall at the top of the long

stairway. “I have trouble with stairs,” he mutters.

How long will students keep coming here to dance and drink? Mr. Bell has wondered. Maybe one day the time will be right for a club commemorating the first decade of the 21st century. If he doesn’t open it, somebody else probably will.

**A**N EMPTY shot glass sits on a table in Liz Prince’s office. She has just used it to counsel a student about how much he’s actually drinking, how his nights might turn out differently if he had a bit less.

That’s her job—to be not a prohibitionist, but a realist. “What we know about students,” she says, “is that telling them ‘Bad, bad, bad, don’t do it, it’s wrong’ just doesn’t work.”

As associate director of health promotion at Georgia, Ms. Prince, 51, tries to teach students how to make responsible decisions. A plain-talker who relates easily to young people, she’s a good fit for a university that has embraced a range of prevention, intervention, and counseling strategies. Long considered a party school, Georgia these days is also known among student-health officials as a place that looks campus drinking in the eye.

Ms. Prince leads the John Fontaine Jr. Center for Alcohol Awareness and Education, established in 2006 with a Texas businessman’s donation of \$2-million.

Jack Fontaine had dropped out of Georgia in 1978 because, he says, he drank too much. Now a recovering alcoholic, he named the center after his son who died at 16 in an alcohol-related car crash.

The center employs counselors specializing in alcohol and drug abuse, sexual assault, and other violence. Last year it started the Collegiate Recovery Community, through which students who are overcoming addictions attend regular support groups and weekly seminars on time management, meditation, and résumé writing.

Students who abuse alcohol often have other serious problems that colleges must also confront, Ms. Prince has learned over the years. To put drinking in a box is to ignore its complexity. Heavy drinking may be a health issue, but it can become a student-engagement issue, an academic-success issue, a retention issue.

Students who violate Georgia’s campus alcohol policies are usually referred to the Fontaine center, where a screening may guide them to a one-on-one harm-reduction program or a series of group

sessions. Many students confess to feeling unconnected to the rest of the campus, says Ms. Prince. Recently she helped start a mentoring program to pair at-risk students with faculty or staff members who help them devise a personal mission statement and a plan to get more engaged.

Ms. Prince says she would have benefited from a frank discussion of alcohol as an undergrad at the State University of New York College at Brockport, where she partied a lot. Her memories of those first



TAMIKA MOORE FOR THE CHRONICLE

**A football-weekend landmark at the U. of Georgia, the Libation Station is run by two businessmen. Near its eight-foot-long bar of liquor and mixers, a sign reads, “We tailgate harder than your team plays.”**

few years are hazy.

After earning a master’s degree in counseling, she spent years living among students. Colleges, she says, are inheriting alcohol problems that students develop in high school or even middle school. In her experience, today’s teenagers are drinking earlier—starting at 13 or 14—and consuming more and harder liquor.

Ms. Prince has thought about the instructions teenagers get about driving. “When you turn 15, we don’t just turn over the keys and go ‘Hey, here’s the car, go drive,’ with no lessons, no driver’s-ed classes, no nothing,” she says. But teenagers don’t often get in-depth lessons about alcohol, such as how it affects men and women differently, or that a woman’s tolerance might vary with her menstrual cycle. “We’re not teaching them,” she says, “how to drink.”

So she runs “bartending school” for incoming students during mandatory orientation sessions at Georgia. Handing over a vodka bottle full of water, she asks them to pour what they think is one drink

into a 16-ounce cup. After a discussion of alcohol's physical effects and consequences, she empties the cups into two-ounce shot glasses. What seemed like one drink is often two or three.

Ms. Prince talks to bar owners and employees, too—about how to tell if a patron's had too much, when to call someone a cab, how cheap-drink specials affect the campus. Many bars, she says, do what they're supposed to—check IDs, cut people off—but others skirt the law. Students here know the names of “freshman bars,” where bouncers barely glance at IDs.

“In college towns, there are people who are going to make a lot of money where liquor is served,” she says. “Their incentive is different than ours.”

Ms. Prince will pipe up all over town. In the parking lot of Sam's Club last year, she saw a group of young men loading boxes of beer and liquor onto a trailer. “That's a lot,” she observed, asking about their plans. Where were they headed? Would there be food there? She introduced herself, explaining that she just wanted them to be careful, safe.

The Fontaine center runs a bystander-intervention program, teaching students techniques to use with their peers. Many want to do the right thing, says Ms. Prince, but they don't know what that is. So they often end up saying nothing.

The same is true of adults. Ms. Prince recalls her first Georgia football game, where she saw, across the aisle, two young women propping up an inebriated young man whose head rolled from side to side. Everyone in the section stared.

When the man's head fell forward into a spectator, Ms. Prince heard his friends say, “Let's feed him something.” Not a good idea, she told them, because he might vomit and inhale his own puke. She advised them to take him home.

When the group left, the fans around her applauded, Ms. Prince recalls. “Everyone was thinking the same thing, but no one was going to do anything.”

**T**HE music throbs and lights pulsate as hundreds of students, hands in the air, jump ecstatically to the beat. In a booth suspended far above, a DJ spins high-energy house music, heavy on thumping bass. The crowd moves like a single supercharged organism, guys pumping their fists, women cheering.

But at this party? No alcohol or drugs, please.

Its planners are Phi Slam, a group of students whose motto is “When was the last time you had your mind blown?” Another might be, “The most fun you can have sober.”

Adam Tenny, a senior, is one of the organizers. He discovered Phi Slam not long after he arrived at Georgia, when a group of upperclassmen pounded on his door and invited him to play flag football. This is what Phi Slam calls “storming the dorm”: running up and down the halls of every freshman

high-rise at the start of the fall semester. After the game, the members told him about a barbecue, then about Scoop-a-Loop, a dance party and ice-cream social. In short order, Mr. Tenny was a member of Phi Slam.

The focus on freshmen is no accident. In the first weeks and months of college, students are searching for a niche, trying to fit in. If all they see is drinking, then it stands to reason they'll drink, too. “The people you surround yourself with,” Mr. Tenny says, “is who you will become.”

The group puts on a dozen or more events each semester, like football watch parties, cosmic slip 'n' slide, and the popular BonFryer, where students can bring candy, cookie dough, doughnuts—anything, really—to be fried up in a boiling vat of pancake batter (there's a bonfire, too; hence “bon”). Twice a year, Phi Slam stages an epic dance party with an elaborate theme. Close to 4,000 students turned out for this fall's shindig, which marked the group's 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

Phi Slam's origins are this: a half-dozen bored

## Asked who is the president of the United States, the student names her sorority president.

roommates looking for something to do on a Saturday night. They didn't want to hit the bars downtown but found the nondrinking alternatives, like university-sponsored movie nights or trips to the mall, kind of lame.

So they got some music, picked up a few boxes of those cheap colored ice pops, and invited 20 of their friends. When more than 100 people showed up, the guys knew they weren't alone in their desire for an alcohol-free social scene. Phi Slam—the name is a tongue-in-cheek nod to Georgia's many fraternities—was born.

As members of the original group neared graduation, they recruited new members. Today the core organizers number about 20. It's a shoestring operation, unaffiliated with the university. Many parties are at an apartment where some of the Phi Slammers live; bigger events take place on an adjacent empty lot. The imaginative sets are DIY, and much of the budget is underwritten by grateful parents. For the rest, members beg, borrow, but don't

steal—they are united by a strong, if little-talked-about, Christian faith. They're putting on parties, Mr. Tenny explains. "We're not trying to get thousands of people to have Bible study."

Almost 22 and boy-band handsome, Mr. Tenny came to Georgia terrified, he says, of the pressure he might face to drink. Some of his high-school classmates did, but he'd remained sheltered. "School, soccer, video games, that was my life," he says. "My parents had it pretty easy with me." College, he knew, would be different.

But he had a hunch that there were others who would prefer an alternative, if they only knew where to look. Phi Slam tries to be where students are. When much of the university headed south this fall for the football team's annual clash with the University of Florida, Phi Slam held a swing dance at St. Simon's Island, where Georgia fans traditionally stop for the night and party.

The university itself puts on alcohol-free events. One recent Friday night the University Union held an "Up, Up, and UGA" party, featuring a climbing wall, bungee trampoline, and tethered hot-air balloon that took students on a four-story-high ride. Phi Slam had used a similar theme last year.

Despite the group's appeal, organizers are not naïve. Phi Slam polices its events, hiring off-duty officers to ensure that its parties are drug- and alcohol-free. But there's nothing stopping people from drinking beforehand, and Mr. Tenny knows that some probably do. Nor does he kid himself that Phi Slam is anything but an alternative to the alcohol culture that is the norm in Athens, with its rows of bars and never-ending drink specials. "We've gotten to the point," he says, "where it seems like every day of the week is Thirsty Thursday."

Now in his final semester, Mr. Tenny has reflected on what Phi Slam has meant to him. He came out of his shell, gained confidence, met like-minded friends. He found the strength to say "No thanks," even when everyone around him was drinking. He occasionally has a beer or two with friends, but he hasn't been tempted to go downtown, he says. "When you weigh the pros and cons"—hefty bar tabs or legal trouble versus focusing on schoolwork—"alcohol can be a distraction."

Phi Slam provides a path for those who want to take it, says Mr. Tenny. "Maybe we can make a difference for one person, for an individual, even if we can't change the culture."

**J**ASON BENING surveys the bedlam around him. Men and women of all ages, high-fiving and shouting. It's a Saturday in November, and parties are going in every corner of Georgia's campus. But none is louder than the one at the corner of South Lumpkin and Wray Streets. On a wide patch of grass, Mr. Bening greets friends and strangers at a tailgate where nobody goes hungry or thirsty. It's

called the Libation Station.

Today's gathering is especially raucous. In two hours, the football team will play the Auburn Tigers, among Georgia's biggest rivals. The game has whipped up the Bulldog faithful, many having arrived before 7 a.m., the earliest the university lets fans set up their tables and tents. It's one rule Georgia imposes on the legions of tailgaters who take over the campus six or seven times a year. They are free to drink as much as they want, most anywhere they want. Like right here, across from the department of romance languages.

Tailgates are reunions, rituals, traditions. They are also daylong drinking parties, which Georgia, like many institutions, enables by providing thousands of parking spaces. Setting out hundreds of trash and recycling bins. Renting dozens of porta-potties, which cover the campus on game days.

Fans stake claims on territory in front of the admissions office, near dorms, on hillsides. "Some of our adults are some of our worst problems," says an athletic-department official. "The old crowd comes back, drinks a little too much, and it thinks it is 20 years old." Some partyers don't even plan to go to the game.

The Libation Station began years ago as a small gathering in the historic part of campus. But after fans repeatedly trashed the place, destroying the grass, the university imposed new rules: No more tents, kegs, grills, or televisions over there. "We don't blame them," Mr. Bening says. "People were abusing it." So hard-core tailgaters like him moved elsewhere. Over time, the Libation Station has grown in size and popularity. This summer its masterminds made a promotional video for their tailgate. Some devotees wear bracelets bearing its name.

It's an impressive kingdom. Beneath strands of lights ensconced in red and black Solo cups, a big table is covered with grilled snacks. An eight-foot-long bar is loaded with liquor and mixers. A dozen coolers brim with beer and soda. A sign says: "We tailgate harder than your team plays."

Mr. Bening and his friend Rick Floyd, a 1984 Georgia graduate who hasn't missed a game in 22 years, make all this happen. Although Mr. Bening graduated from Southern Illinois University, 30 years ago, he loves the Dawgs deeply; his son, Hunter, plays first base for the university's baseball team. Both men, who live a couple of hours away, have been successful. Mr. Bening is vice president and regional sales director at a surgical-supply company; Mr. Floyd owns a trucking company and a mortgage firm.

On Saturdays they are passionate hosts. "This is the best," says Mr. Bening, in a jacket emblazoned with a G. "We just love throwing a big party."

For today's tailgate, Mr. Bening says, he and Mr. Floyd spent about \$2,000 on food and maybe another two or three grand on booze. Maker's Mark,

Jack Daniel's, and 18 handles of Ketel One vodka. "A whole lotta alcohol," Mr. Bening says. "We're down to the last two bottles of Ketel One."

Or not. A young woman runs over: "Someone just snatched two handles of vodka off the bar!"

Inside a big metal box connected to a propane tank, tonight's specialty is cooking: a Lowcountry Boil with sausage, shrimp, corn, and lemons. Mr. Bening opens the lid, releasing a blast of cayenne, and shouts something to Mr. Floyd.

It's hard to hear anyone. Journey's "Don't Stop Believin'" booms from tall speakers. "I've got a migraine times three," says the wife of one of the regulars. She grabs a bottle of Tanqueray she's stashed beneath a table and refills her gin and tonic.

The booze is almost gone, but Mr. Bening isn't worried. He's got a postgame stash in his truck. "If we win," he says, grinning, "we might have a celebratory cocktail."

Not far away, revelers mosey by. A man wheels a keg in a shopping cart. A woman in black-cotton gloves carries a stemless wineglass. A student giving directions holds up a handle of Fireball whiskey, pointing west.

Over at the Tent City tailgate, some people with small children stick to soda. A Georgia graduate with a jug of Pralines and Dick (Praline pecan liqueur, George Dickel whiskey, and half-and-half) tries to imagine what would happen if the university ever banned alcohol at tailgates. Fans would protest, he says, maybe boycott a few games, but eventually get over it.

Others scoff. "I'll tell you what would happen," says a white-haired man near the student center, with a cup of Crown Royal on ice. "People would show up with it anyway!"

Just past 7:15, Georgia kicks off to Auburn. Glowing tents full of fans line the sidewalks. Everywhere,

flat-screen TVs glimmer in the dark. At the Libation Station, a small group cheers as the Bulldogs stuff a second-down running play. "Hurt him!" someone yells. The Tigers score first, but the Bulldogs eventually prevail, 34-7. As promised, victory cocktails flow. The long, loud celebration spills downtown. On this night, police officers will make 10 arrests and issue 72 citations.

The next morning, the sunrise illumines a campus strewn with debris. In one quad, someone's left a set of lawn chairs. Scavengers carry off abandoned coolers.

At South Lumpkin and Wray, the sweet stench of booze lingers in the cold air. The Libation Station's supplies are gone, its tents packed away. All that remains are trash bags and recycling boxes, overflowing with cans and cups.

On Sundays after football games, the athletic department oversees an enormous cleanup operation. It contracts with a local company that hires people to pick up each bottle, each bottlecap. Dozens of workers in blue latex gloves use long poles to pluck acres of garbage. One, an elderly man pulling trash from some bushes, says he'll make \$70 for five or six hours of work.

In his tattered coat, he is yet another participant in a seemingly ceaseless cycle. He will go on cleaning up, just as delivery drivers will make their rounds, as students will party and police officers will patrol. Even as counselors and educators try to curb overconsumption, to slow down the alcohol culture, it rolls on. In Athens, as on campuses everywhere, drinking is the default.

By 8 a.m. on this Sunday, cleanup is in full swing. Tank trucks service the porta-potties, and flatbeds take them away. By dusk, the last of the trash has been hauled off, leaving the campus as it was, before the party began.

*Originally published on December 1, 2014*



GREG KAHN, GRAIN

# Why Colleges Haven't Stopped Students From Binge Drinking

By BETH MCMURTRIE

**D**ESPITE DECADES of research, hundreds of campus task forces, and millions invested in bold experiments, college drinking remains as much of a problem as ever.

More than 1,800 students die every year of alcohol-related causes. An additional 600,000 are injured while drunk, and nearly 100,000 become victims of alcohol-influenced sexual assaults. One in four say their academic performance has suffered from drinking, all according to the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism.

The binge-drinking rate among college students has hovered above 40 percent for two decades, and signs are that partying is getting even harder. More students now drink to get drunk, choose hard liquor over beer, and front-load, or drink in advance of social events. For many the goal is to black out.

Drinking is so central to students' expectations of college that they will fight for what they see as a basic right. After Syracuse University, named the nation's No. 1 party school by the Princeton Review, tried to limit a large outdoor gathering, out-

raged students labeled the campus a police state.

Why has the drumbeat of attention, effort, and money failed to influence what experts consider a public-health crisis? It's not for lack of information. Dozens of studies show exactly why, when, where, and how students drink. Plenty more identify effective intervention and prevention strategies. A whole industry has sprung up around educating students on the dangers of alcohol abuse.

For the most part, undeterred by evidence that information alone isn't enough, colleges continue to treat alcohol abuse as an individual problem, one that can be fixed primarily through education.

"Institutions of higher education are still really committed to the idea that if we just provide the right information or the right message, that will do the trick, despite 30 or 40 years of research that shows that's not true," says Robert F. Saltz, a senior research scientist at the Prevention Research Center, part of the Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation. "The message isn't what changes behavior. Enforcement changes behavior."

Yet many colleges still look the other way. Few have gone after environmental factors like cheap and easy access to alcohol. Or lenient attitudes toward underage drinking. A Greek system fueled by booze. Alcohol-soaked traditions like football tailgates and spring flings. They all remain staples of college life.

At some colleges, presidents are reluctant to take on boosters and alumni who fervently defend rituals where drinking can get out of control. Administrators responsible for prevention often aren't equipped with the community-organizing skills to get local politicians, bar owners, and the police to try new approaches, enforce laws, and punish bad actors. And where profits and tax revenue are at stake, as with local bars and sporting events, colleges encounter resistance that they are unable or unwilling to overcome.

A student's death or an unwelcome party-school ranking might prompt action, but it is unlikely to be sustained or meaningful. A new prevention program or task force has only so much impact.

Even at colleges that try to confront these issues comprehensively, turnover and limited budgets pose significant obstacles. When administrations change, so do priorities. Key staff members move on. Each year a new class of freshmen comes in ready to party. Monitoring drinking in dorm rooms, let alone sparking real change, can seem all but impossible.

**I**F THIS is an era of resignation, the 1990s were one of possibility. College presidents declared alcohol abuse the greatest threat to campus life, and the federal government demanded that they do something.

The first large-scale examination of alcohol

use among college students began in 1993. Run by Henry Wechsler, a social psychologist at the Harvard University School of Public Health, the College Alcohol Study surveyed 17,000 students at 140 colleges on why and how they drink.

The following year, Mr. Wechsler pronounced 44 percent of all college students binge drinkers, coining that use of the term to mean consuming four or five drinks in a row, and setting off a storm of news coverage. The results helped shift public understanding of college drinking from a relatively harmless pastime to a public-health concern. The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, which financed the first survey, invested millions in further surveys and research.

Mr. Wechsler and his team painted a complex portrait of campus culture, one in which the environment fuels excessive drinking. More than half of the bars surrounding campuses, they found, used discounts and other promotions to lure in students. Higher rates of binge drinking were associated with membership in a fraternity or sorority, a belief that most students drink, and easy access to alcohol.

At the same time, the studies made clear that much is beyond colleges' control. Half of students had started binge drinking before they got to campus. In states where alcohol was a problem generally, colleges showed higher binge-drinking rates. On the other hand, strong laws against fake IDs and other restrictive measures were correlated with lower levels of drinking among young people.

Advocates and policy makers sensed an opportunity. The U.S. Department of Education established the Higher Education Center for Alcohol, Drug Use and Violence Prevention, which provided research, training, and technical assistance. Mr. Wechsler's findings sparked a 10-campus experiment, called A Matter of Degree, to try to bring drinking under control. Focusing on colleges with higher-than-average rates of binge drinking, the project aimed to prove that by working with community partners to change the environment, colleges have the power to shift student behavior. The Johnson foundation put more than \$17-million into the project, which was conducted with the American Medical Association over a 12-year period.

But attention doesn't equal action, never mind progress. Early results showed that in the first few years, half of the colleges involved didn't try much of anything. The other half reported "significant although small" improvements in drinking behavior. Meanwhile, a survey of about 750 college presidents found that they were sticking to what they'd always done, focusing on arguably effective "social norming" campaigns, which aim to curb students' drinking with the message that their peers don't drink as much as it seems.



GREG KAHN, GRAIN

A consortium of colleges in Maryland, including the U. of Maryland at College Park, helped establish a ban this year on the sale of extreme-strength alcohol in the state.

Today a number of colleges that participated in the lengthy experiment still struggle with students' alcohol problems, even showing up on party-school lists.

The magnitude and complexity of the challenges facing colleges were clear. Thriving fake-ID industries. Endless happy hours. Limited enforcement of alcohol and noise ordinances off campus. Greek systems that revolve around drinking and dominate social life.

Several colleges developed new programs: training servers, notifying parents when underage students were caught drinking, and coordinating enforcement with the local police. Setbacks, however, were common. Louisiana State University found local bar owners hostile to the idea of scaling back happy hours or drink specials. At the University of Colorado at Boulder, the campus-community coalition had little authority. To appeal to local businesses, a new mayor in Newark, Del., weakened regulations on selling alcohol near dormitories at the public flagship university.

At Florida State University, a local partnership's efforts were met with stiff resistance from

the alcohol industry, *The Wall Street Journal* reported in 2003. Bar owners and distributors formed a competing group to oppose the quest for new laws and regulations to control students' access to alcohol. The university eventually backed down. The president at the time said he didn't want to spend his political capital given everything else he was trying to accomplish in the Florida Legislature.

The following years saw the end of several major projects. Mr. Wechsler's College Alcohol Study wrapped up in 2006, having surveyed 50,000 students and produced reams of research. The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation shifted its attention elsewhere. The Amethyst Initiative, a campaign by more than 100 college presidents to reconsider the legal drinking age, came and quickly went. And in 2012, funding cuts eliminated the federal center that had guided colleges on preventing alcohol and drug abuse.

Jim Yong Kim, a physician with a public-health background who was president of Dartmouth College, attempted to drag the issue back into the spotlight, announcing an inten-

sive, public-health and data-driven approach to dealing with campus drinking. He used his influence to drum up participation from 32 institutions in the National College Health Improvement Program's Learning Collaborative on High-Risk Drinking, and secured money to keep it going for two years. But when he left Dartmouth to lead the World Bank, in 2012, the leadership and the money dried up. The project issued its first and final report this year.

Educators and researchers who lived through this period say a combination of exhaustion, frustration, inertia, lack of resources, and campus and community politics derailed the national conversation about college drinking. Taking on the problem proved tougher than anyone had thought.

"All those efforts caused some issue fatigue," says John D. Clapp, director of the federal alcohol and drug center when it closed. The feeling, he says, was "Hey, we tried this, and it's time to move on."

**T**HE APPARENT paradox today is this: Colleges keep trying to reduce extreme drinking, but the numbers aren't getting any better.

It's hard to change the status quo by tinkering at the margins. Many colleges continue pursuing disjointed and short-term measures with limited impact and little staying power.

Almost all four-year colleges have alcohol policies and require incoming students to take some kind of course, often online, that warns of the dangers of alcohol abuse, according to surveys by researchers at the University of Minnesota. Most campuses provide alcohol-free housing and run party patrols. And half offer intervention or recovery programs for problem drinkers. Of the 32 campuses in the group started by the former Dartmouth president, most focused their energy on alcohol policies, social-norming campaigns, educational programs, and student surveys.

But that's the relatively easy, noncontroversial stuff. Angry alumni won't rise up over an online prevention course.

Here's what colleges aren't doing. Fewer than half consistently enforce their alcohol policies at tailgates, in dormitories, and at fraternity and sorority houses. Only a third do compliance checks to monitor illegal alcohol sales in nearby neighborhoods. Just 7 percent try to restrict the number of outlets selling alcohol, and 2 percent work to reduce cheap drink specials at local bars, according to the Minnesota researchers.

Yet restricting easy access to alcohol and penalizing students who break the rules do make a difference, studies suggest. One project, Safer California Universities, tested a series of community-based prevention strategies, and

found that the number of people getting drunk at off-campus parties and bars dropped significantly. Participating colleges used DUI checks, underage decoys, party patrols, and enforcement of local ordinances that hold hosts liable for any trouble caused by their drunken guests.

So why aren't more colleges taking such bold action?

Philosophically, many educators are resistant to the idea of policing students. They would prefer to treat them as young adults who can make good choices with the right motivation. Traci L. Toomey, who directs the alcohol-epidemiology program at Minnesota's School of Public Health, recalls visiting a campus that had long prided itself on letting students monitor the flow of alcohol at social events. "As if somehow magically they'd do a great job," she says.

That college was part of the Learning Collaborative on High-Risk Drinking, in which

**"The message isn't what changes behavior. Enforcement changes behavior."**

other participants also expressed resistance to designing and enforcing better prevention policies. "There was all this talk about protecting students' rights and treating them like adults, and oftentimes it was really about protecting the students who were drinking," says Ms. Toomey. "I tried to raise the question: Not all of our students drink, and not all drink heavily. Their rights are being violated, their ability to study, to sleep, to walk across campus safely. Why aren't we protecting their rights?"

That institutional ambivalence can hamper enforcement. In the Minnesota surveys, only about 60 percent of campus law-enforcement officials said they almost always proactively enforce alcohol policies. Half cited barriers such as understaffing and students' easy access to alcohol at private parties and at bars that don't check IDs. Only 35 percent of colleges' law-enforcement units almost always issue criminal citations for serious alcohol-related incidents, preferring instead to refer cases to other offices, like judicial or student affairs.

Students themselves say more-aggressive en-

forcement could change their behavior. One survey of those who had violated their colleges' alcohol policies found that parental notification, going through the criminal-justice system, or being required to enter an alcohol treatment program would be more of a deterrent than fines and warnings.

Top administrators rarely carry the banner of prevention and make it a campuswide priority. Instead, efforts are shouldered by entry-level health or student-affairs coordinators, which can result in narrow approaches.

That makes structural change difficult. How do you limit excessive or underage drinking off campus without enlisting the support of the owners of liquor stores and bars? How do you deal with an oversaturation of bars without talking with politicians and state licensing agencies? How do you crack down on off-campus parties without working with the local police? How do you hold fraternities responsible for underage drinking without the cooperation of their national organizations?

Without high-level leadership and broad buy-in, students get mixed messages about what their college is willing to tolerate. The bookstore might stock college-licensed molds for Jell-O shots. Football stadiums may sell beer. Some colleges allow—even sponsor—blowout parties, spending serious money monitoring and cleaning up after drunk students.

Duke University was home to an all-day party known as Tailgate, which raged in a parking lot before and after every home football game. Wearing costumes, cranking up the music, and funneling beer, students left behind a mess so huge it required front-loaders to clear. Administrators tried all sorts of things—cars versus no cars, kegs versus cans, shorter and longer hours, food and entertainment—in a futile effort to rein in bad behavior.

Larry Moneta, vice president for student affairs, attended every Tailgate. In an oral history compiled by Duke's student newspaper, *The Chronicle*, he estimated that it cost "probably hundreds of thousands of dollars" in staff time and maintenance.

"I'd say to folks, 'You understand what you're doing here? You're representing the worst stereotypes of Duke. The wealthy, couldn't-careless, partying it up and leaving your shit on the ground so the lowest-paid employees can come and clean up after you. Doesn't that message mean anything to you?' It gets through when you're sober, doesn't get through when you're not sober."

The party lasted until 2010, when a 14-year-old sibling of a student was found passed out in a portable toilet. "That was the final straw," Mr. Moneta says in an interview. Administrators fi-

nally shut it down.

Fraternities and sororities remain a third rail for many college presidents. "Even though the Greek system was identified as the highest area of risk in terms of harm and rates of drinking, we didn't have many schools touch that," says Lisa C. Johnson, a former managing director of the Learning Collaborative on High-Risk Drinking. "It's fraught with politics. It's fraught with, Are we going to lose funding from alumni who value the traditions? Also, it's complex because Greek houses may be owned by the fraternities, not the university."

Dartmouth has had one of the more public struggles with its Greek system, the subject of numerous unflattering portraits. Ironically, while Dr. Kim was a national leader on the issue, at home he was perceived as going easy on fraternities and sororities, telling the campus newspaper, "I barely have any power."

That may be changing. In April, after watching applications plummet 14 percent, Dartmouth's new president, Philip J. Hanlon, spoke about how the college had succumbed to "extreme and harmful behaviors," including hazing, racism, sexual assault, and dangerous drinking. The answer is "fundamental change" in the social scene, including the Greek system, he said. "Enough is enough."

**C**OLLEGE alcohol-abuse prevention doesn't have a powerful advocacy arm. But a dedicated group of people is determined to keep the issue on the national agenda.

The National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, which three years ago formed a committee of college-president advisers, plans to come out next year with guidelines for colleges on which interventions work well.

The Higher Education Center for Alcohol and Drug Misuse and Prevention opened this year at Ohio State University, under the direction of Mr. Clapp, who led the shuttered federal center. He secured grant money, \$2-million from the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation, to translate alcohol research into strategies that colleges can use, he says. "The idea is to give people tools that don't necessarily need a ton of money to implement" or "50 to 60 staff people to run."

Some state higher-education coalitions have been working with legislators. The Maryland Collaborative to Reduce College Drinking and Related Problems, a joint effort of 11 institutions, helped establish a ban this year on the sale of extreme-strength alcohol in the state.

Several colleges have also reached the breaking point with campus events, like Duke's Tailgate, that had spun out of control. Last year John C. Bravman, president of Bucknell University, permanently canceled its annual House

Party Weekend. Once a dress-up affair, it had devolved into a multiday bender during which students urinated in public, showed up drunk to class, and got belligerent with emergency-room doctors. A few students consumed so much alcohol that doctors thought they might not survive.

Mr. Bravman laid all of this out in a brutally honest letter to the campus, arguing that he couldn't in good conscience allow such "self-degrading" behavior to continue. It will take more than eliminating one event to curb high-risk drinking, he said in a recent interview, "but we made our point. We made a statement about the values of this institution."

That kind of argument helped break down resistance to increased oversight among participants in the Learning Collaborative on High-Risk Drinking, Ms. Johnson says. "There was a lot of throwing hands up at first: 'We don't want a police state at our school.' It wasn't until they began to reframe the issue—that our institutional mission is to educate and provide a supportive learning environment"—that participating colleges saw the value in enforcement and control.

Some prevention advocates hope that scrutiny of sexual assault on campuses may result in more attention to alcohol abuse, because the connection has been well documented. It took a series of federal complaints and investigations, supporters say, for colleges to begin revising and better enforcing

their sexual-assault policies.

Others are betting that money will talk. Jonathan C. Gibraltar, president of Frostburg State University, calculated that alcohol abuse cost \$1-million in staff time and lost tuition over a recent four-year period. Putting a price tag on the problem, he says, helps keep people motivated to crack down on off-campus parties, work with local law enforcement, and raise expectations among students.

Mr. Clapp, at Ohio State, wants to make a similar economic argument to college presidents. Those high dropout rates you've been wrestling with? The slacker students who study a little and party a lot? The liability risks you take allowing dangerous behaviors to go on? They're not doing your campus any favors.

The different forces at play nationally may not be enough to focus attention on dangerous drinking in college, but culture change can happen. It's just slow, says John Porter, director of the Center for Health and Well Being at the University of Vermont, which has grappled with alcohol abuse for more than two decades. Asked to lead a new campuswide approach to the problem, Mr. Porter remains hopeful. When he was a child, he says, he used to sit on his mother's lap in the front seat of their Buick. She'd be smoking cigarettes. Nobody was wearing seat belts. "Today we'd be aghast," he says.

A generation from now, will we feel the same way about binge drinking?

*Originally published on December 2, 2014*

# 4 Campuses Respond to Risky Drinking

## California State U. at Chico: Changing a Party Culture

Chico State has been known as a party school at least since 1987, when it topped *Playboy's* list. But alcohol-related deaths two years ago prompted the university and the community to act.

"We have here in Chico what some people like to call the perfect storm of access and prices," says Trisha Seastrom, program director of the Campus Alcohol and Drug Education Center.

Inspired by its involvement in the national Learning Collaborative on High Risk Drinking, the university is trying a variety of measures, including more regulation, parent education, and quicker intervention when trouble arises.

With the support of the student government, the university persuaded the City Council to pass legislation leading to fewer raucous house parties. Consistent messages from the campus president that partyers are no longer welcome may have helped reduce the share of incoming freshmen who drink heavily, according to surveys. But there have been setbacks, too, like the stalling of an attempt to get the municipal Planning Commission to control the number of bars in town.

The university still has more than a dozen plans under way. "There's no silver bullet," says Ms. Seastrom. "All of these things together will create a safer environment."

## Lehigh U.: Keeping Tabs on Fraternities and Sororities

At Lehigh, nearly 40 percent of students belong to a fraternity or sorority, long the sources of much underage and excessive drinking. Twelve years ago, the university invested millions in the Greek system: improved living conditions, more staff, and leadership training. Campus officials also made every group undergo annual accreditation. The motto: "Be great or be gone (We'll help either way)."

Yet problems persist, and new ones arise. Three Greek houses this year were suspended for allowing underage drinking. An increase in off-campus parties suggests that students are trying to get around the monitoring system.

Stricter penalties for consuming hard liquor and more alcohol-free social events have helped cut down on the number of freshmen in the emergency room. "I'm proud of the progress we have made," says John W. Smeaton, vice provost for student affairs. "But it's not a math equation."

*Originally published on December 3, 2014*

## Yale U.: Ivies, Too, Have Problems

While Big State U. may forever evoke images of keg parties and tailgates, elite institutions have their own problems with alcohol. They just tend to keep them quiet.

Yale decided this year to start talking. The proportion of students there who say they binge drink: 62 percent. Of those, the share who say they've drunk so much they've blacked out: 24 percent.

Yale's attitude is part of a new, public-health approach encouraging colleges to take a hard look at student culture. "Much of what we are learning flies in the face of common campus beliefs," the university notes.

Administrators are bringing people on the decentralized campus together to discuss alcohol problems, enforce rules, and encourage students to seek help. "Previously it was individual students who were helped through counseling services," says Hannah Rose Peck, director of student life. "Now we're helping Yale think about this as a community issue."

## U. of Nebraska at Lincoln: Community Coalition

Nebraska is widely considered a model of how to build strong local partnerships. Action was possible there because of a coalition led by the chancellor and Lincoln's mayor, says Linda Major, director of the university's Center for Civic Engagement. Even then, she says, "it was five years before our binge-drinking rate dropped below 50 percent."

Nebraska is precise in its approach, relying heavily on data. Detox centers ask people where they had their last drink, helping officials identify problem bars. Through the local hospitality council, the university promotes peer pressure to stop some of the more outrageous cheap-drink specials. One bar owner had said that anyone who could drink a 13-shot concoction in an hour and make his way out the door would be rewarded with a T-shirt and his name on the wall. "We sat him in the room with the other business owners, and they said knock it off," recalls Ms. Major. "And he did."

The police now use a noise ordinance to crack down on landlords who tolerate wild parties, and administrators have successfully lobbied for laws to help reduce underage and unsafe drinking. Coordination is crucial, Ms. Major says, in focusing attention on trouble spots. "It's really hard to keep that level of activity that we had in our early days of work."

— BETH MCMURTRIE



MARK ABRAMSON FOR THE CHRONICLE

Underwear with messages like “Ask before unwrapping” were put on display by students at Union College (N.Y.) as part of a campaign against sexual assault. “No college has all the right solutions yet,” says Shayna Han (right), a senior who helped start a group at Union dedicated to sexual consent.

# The New Rules of Sex and Booze

By ROBIN WILSON

SCHENECTADY, N.Y.  
**I**T WAS a typical Saturday night at the house on Park Street where the Union College men’s hockey team goes after games to unwind and party. Sébastien Gingras, a 6-foot-1 defenseman, noticed a classmate hovering around a young woman who looked unsteady.

Mr. Gingras watched them. “She was a fresh-

man, and this was a guy from outside the team who had the reputation of trying to get girls when they were drunk,” he says. After a while, “the guy was sitting next to her on a couch, trying to get her to leave.” So Mr. Gingras, a junior, asked one of his teammates to call the guy over to distract him while Mr. Gingras checked the young woman’s ID and walked her back to her dorm.

Hanging out, drinking, and hooking up are for many students just part of life in college. They're also a common backdrop for sexual assault. As many as four in five campus assaults involve drinking, studies have found. Plenty of those cases hinge on whether a woman was drunk or incapacitated, and therefore unable to give consent.

Messages about preventing sexual assault now come at students from many directions: campus and federal officials, the news media, their peers. And what students are hearing has started to influence their behavior. They're paying more attention, and they're looking out for one another.

That's precisely what President Obama's new campaign, "It's On Us," is asking them to do: "to intervene if we see someone in a risky situation." Union College, with 2,250 undergraduates, enlisted its popular hockey team, which won last year's Division I national championship, to sign the campaign's pledge and encourage others to take seriously the goal of protecting students.

People here think it's working. "We're hearing from more students concerned about what they are seeing or hearing," says Amanda E. Tommell-Sandy, assistant director of the counseling center. "We are seeing more students sharing that they have intervened."

Deciding when a friend is having fun and when it's time to step in can be tricky. Students here and elsewhere are fumbling a bit in new roles—ordering a man talking with a tipsy woman to leave a party, or seeing a drunk couple together and calling campus security. "No college has all of the right solutions yet," says Shayna Han, a senior at Union who helped start the college's Committee on Consent Education and Awareness this year.

The idea on many campuses is that intervention, not drinking less, is the solution. None of the students *The Chronicle* spoke with talked about scaling back their own drinking to avoid becoming too aggressive or vulnerable. Administrators responsible for sexual-assault prevention feel that they can't say much about alcohol, even though it is a common element in many incidents. If they counsel students to limit consumption, they fear, young women who drink and are assaulted will be blamed, and will blame themselves, perhaps not reporting the attacks.

By monitoring their friends—a practice many colleges now promote—students can watch for both threatening conduct and vulnerability to predators and opportunists. That way, students let one another drink to excess while lowering the risk of assault.

"I am the mom of my group," explains Brianna, a sophomore here who asked that her last name not be used. "Last year I literally pulled my friend away from a guy because they were both too intoxicated." Her friend appreciated her judgment,

Brianna says. "She knew I was completely sober, so she trusted me."

**W**RENCHING stories of sexual assault have rocked many campuses in the past couple of years, sparking protests and scrutiny. Many alleged victims have filed federal complaints about the way their colleges handled their reports.

While Union hasn't had a case go public—the college received five formal reports of sexual assault in 2013—the topic has provoked a lot of discussion.

"I knew we had an opportunity with our hockey team," says Jim McLaughlin, the athletic director. The team attended a half-day workshop in September on bystander intervention. Next in line are the women's hockey team and the men's and women's basketball and swim teams.

"We are tough, bold women, and we would have the confidence to step into a bad situation," says Christine Valente, captain of the women's hockey team.

Athletes aren't the only ones getting involved. Ms. Han and a few classmates formed their group to talk frankly about sexual consent. In November, members wrote slogans on men's and women's underwear and hung them outside the student center. "Ask before unwrapping" said a pair of panties. "I like butts," someone wrote in pink marker on a men's pair. "Butt ... I ask before I touch."

Organizers are holding workshops with sports teams, fraternities, and sororities. But they don't preach or try to give students all the answers. On a recent Thursday evening, the men's lacrosse team packed into a dorm's common area, where the group's presenters, all women, tried to draw the athletes out. What does consent mean? How does sexual assault affect men? How do stereotypes of masculinity play into the problem?

"You should have consent before you go out and party and get drunk, instead of waking up the next day and regretting it," one player said. "As a team, I want to win a national championship," offered another. "I don't want another player going out and touching a woman who doesn't want to be touched and undermining our success." Every time someone spoke up, the women tossed out packets of Sweet Tarts or Reese's Pieces.

After such presentations, students sometimes approach members of the consent group, says Ms. Han, to say they've been applying its lessons. "I was having sex," a student might report, "and I asked for consent!"

**W**OMEN at Union say they do two things to keep themselves and their friends safe from sexual assault. They never walk alone after dark, and they go to parties in groups. Some also bring their own alcohol—keeping their



MARK ABRAMSON FOR THE CHRONICLE

**Members of the men's lacrosse team at Union College return from a campus workshop on sexual consent. The women leading the workshop asked them, What does consent mean? How does sexual assault affect men? How do stereotypes of masculinity play into the problem?**

drinks covered and close at hand. Campus safety officers taught three self-defense classes this fall, and the Theta Delta Chi fraternity offered to buy women a new kind of nail polish that is supposed to change colors to detect the presence of common date-rape drugs.

Relatively few sexual assaults on college campuses, however, involve strangers, weapons, overwhelming physical force, or date-rape drugs, experts say. The most common substance consumed by victims is alcohol.

"There is this notion of the predator out there, and those people definitely exist," says Steve Leavitt, dean of students at Union. "But we haven't seen them in any of our judicial cases." A more common scenario, he says, involves students drinking, and something going wrong.

Like many colleges, Union has tried to control the flow of alcohol. Under new rules this year, fraternity parties must serve bottled water. The familiar red Solo cups are banned—all beer must be distributed in cans—and Union limits the number of cans at each party. It is more difficult to slip

something into a can than a cup, and the lack of cups restricts drinking games.

Still, students can load up on alcohol before parties. Heavy drinking is common here, just as it is on many campuses. What has changed, students say, is how closely they watch out for their drunken friends.

At Sigma Chi, one of Union's biggest fraternities, students party in the basement, with a big American flag painted on the wall and a beat-up wooden stage for the DJ. Brothers step in if a woman complains of aggressive behavior, says Ben Nadareski, the chapter's president.

This year a female student accused a classmate looking to join Sigma Chi of offensive conduct after a night of partying (Mr. Nadareski declined to offer specifics). She reported the incident to her resident assistant, and the college disciplined the student. Because of privacy law, Union didn't tell Sigma Chi about the violation, but the fraternity rejected the student as a brother, saying it didn't want someone like that among its 90 members.

For the most part, women here say they feel safe

at frat houses. Meghan, a senior who asked that her last name not be used, remembers being at a party last year without her closest friends. “I got really, really drunk,” she says.

A fraternity brother took her up to his bedroom, Meghan says, propped her up on her side in his bed, and locked the door so no one could bother her. “I woke up with a cup of water next to the bed,” she says, “and a text saying: ‘I’m in the chapter room downstairs. When you wake up, come and get me.’”

Meghan was grateful, she says. “I have a lot of somebodies around to help me.”

**S**O WHEN do friends step in for one another? The new emphasis on bystander intervention may be making some students a little overzealous.

Elizabeth Murad, a junior at Union, says one of her friends was drinking heavily at a party one night and made out with a guy they didn’t know well. “After a while I asked her, ‘Are you OK?’” says Ms. Murad. The friend said yes but added that she didn’t want things to go any further.

As Ms. Murad called her over to a group of girlfriends, a male classmate who had witnessed the interaction yelled at the young man. “He said the guy shouldn’t even be talking to her when she’s drunk,” says Ms. Murad. “It’s good he was looking out for her, but she can do what she wants. He was being out of line about it, and he got kicked out.”

One student was worried when his roommate brought a woman back to their dorm room after both had been drinking. “He wondered if he could be seen as part of the problem if he ignored it,” says Marcus S. Hotaling, director of counseling. So he called campus safety. Officers knocked on the door, and both students responded that they were there willingly.

The culture of looking out for one another

*Originally published on December 3, 2014*

means making judgments for your classmates, or at least asking. Mr. Gingras, the hockey player, is an RA in what he calls the biggest party dorm. This fall he saw a couple stumbling down the hall. He pulled the young woman aside and asked, “Are you feeling comfortable?”

She said she wasn’t sure if she wanted to go into a room with the man. “If you put yourself in there,” Mr. Gingras says he told her, “you have to have a clear understanding with him.” She went into the room, he says, came out, and explained to the RA that she’d told the guy she didn’t want to sleep with him yet.

While students watch for signs of trouble, some men are monitoring their own behavior. They want to avoid situations they’ve heard about in which men think sex is consensual, but their partners say otherwise. In some cases, the women have had enough to drink that they don’t remember what happened.

It’s not worth the risk that your partner is not in control of her actions, one hockey player said at a team dinner last month. “A drunk girl holds your life in her hands.”

All the discussion of sexual assault here has heightened awareness while also stoking fear. “It’s made everyone a lot more paranoid,” one student says, “avoiding the gray area at all costs.”

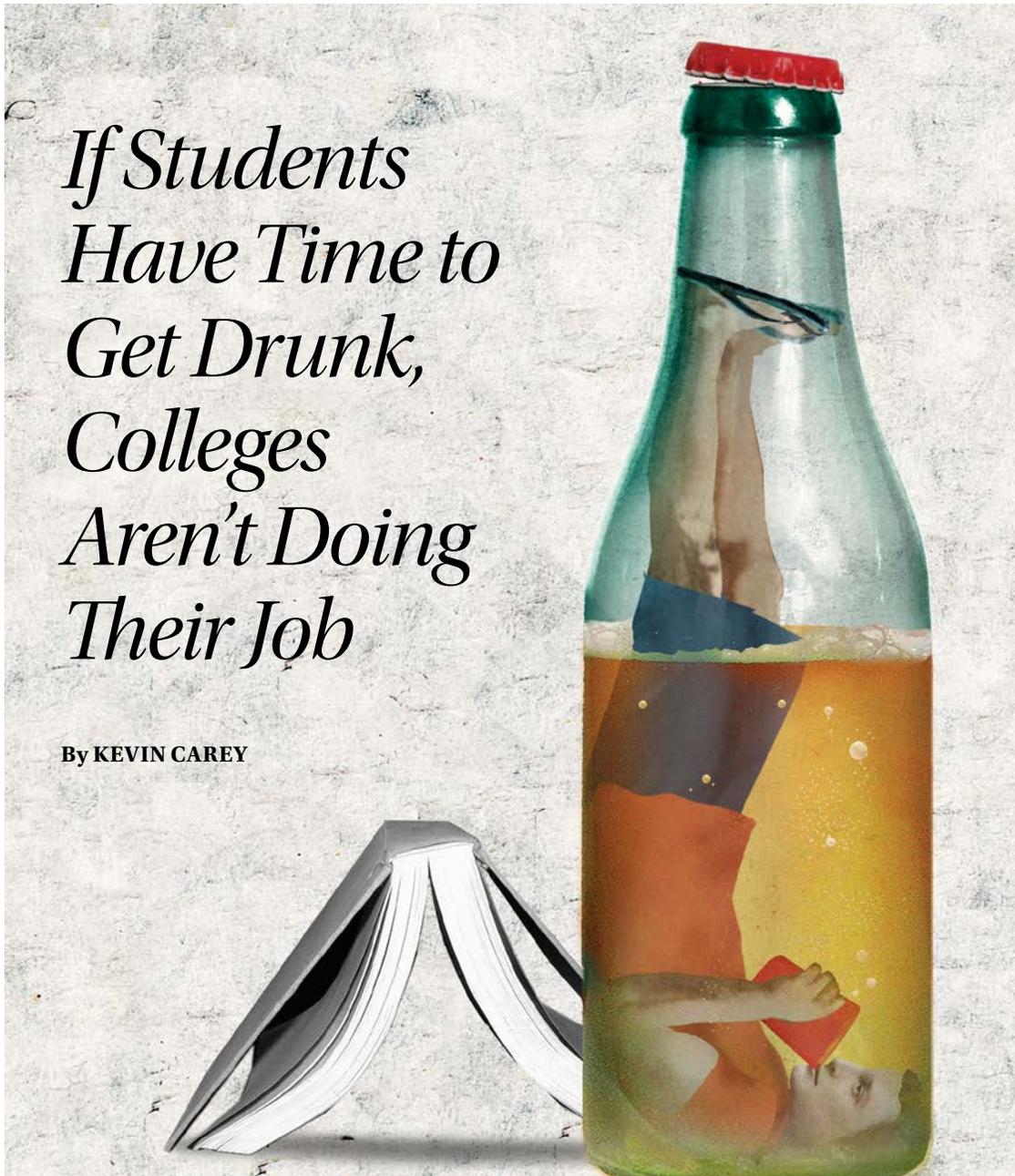
Women notice how sensitive some men have become about appearing inappropriate or aggressive. While that may mean less spontaneity, young women feel more protected—even when they want to party hard.

“This weekend a kid was trying to dance with me,” says Meghan, the senior who was safely tucked in at the frat house. “He asked only once, and I decided not to.” Still, with lessons about consent and respect in his head, his conscience seems to have weighed on him.

The next day he sent her 30 text messages. All of them said, “I’m sorry.”

# *If Students Have Time to Get Drunk, Colleges Aren't Doing Their Job*

By KEVIN CAREY



MICHAEL MORGENSTERN FOR THE CHRONICLE

**A** FEW years ago, I found myself sitting in the corner of a campus student lounge, talking to a 19-year-old named Jessica about what brought her to college, how much she studies, and why her weekends almost never involve getting drunk.

She wasn't a teetotaler for religious reasons and it wasn't because there were many other fun things to do. Her college was in Rochester, Minn., which, in midwinter, consists mainly of subzero temperatures and a lot of elderly sick people in and around

the Mayo Clinic. After three days there, the hotel bar seemed particularly enticing.

Jessica wasn't a party animal for two reasons. First, she had a lot of school work to do. The University of Minnesota's Rochester campus is new and unusual. There are only two majors: health professions and health sciences. The classes are small and the workload demanding. Jessica told me she spends 30 to 40 hours per week studying outside of class, far more than the typical undergraduate.

Second, there is no organized collegiate-drink-

ing infrastructure in Rochester. Fraternities, sororities, and big-time sports are nonexistent. The bars and restaurants are set up for the elderly sick people, not 25-cent drink specials and pregame keg blasts.

Some of Jessica's high-school friends went to St. Cloud State University and came home with stories of lost weekends and more than a few lost weekdays. But Jessica was too busy to party, and there were no parties to attend.

These realities offer the beginnings of a solution to the scourge of collegiate alcohol abuse.

To be sure, nobody is going to change the nature of youth. As one angry father wrote to his son in medieval times, "I have recently discovered that you live dissolutely and slothfully, preferring license to restraint and play to work and strumming a guitar while the others are at their studies, whence it happens that you have read but one volume of law while your more industrious companions have read several." *Plus ça change.*

But there's a difference between idle young men consuming too much mead in the taverns and the kind of relentless, quasi-industrialized alcohol consumption common on many campuses. No one emerges from the womb with a DKE T-shirt and a beer-pong paddle. Students behave this way because we teach them to, primarily through popular culture.

Like many people, I've watched and enjoyed *Animal House* multiple times. It's one of the funniest movies ever made, and also one of the most inadvertently destructive. The conceit, as we all know, is that the hard-drinking brothers of Delta House are anti-authoritarian heroes. But in order to gain the audience's sympathy, the movie cleverly expunges every consequence of the Del-tas' allegedly depraved behavior.

You may think you remember watching a toga party that a member of rival Omega House later described as featuring "individual acts of perversion so profound and disgusting that decorum prohibits us listing them here." But wait—what acts is he talking about? The movie shows none. The party consists entirely of people standing around having fun and dancing to Otis Day and the Knights. All of the sex is consensual. Nobody gets poisoned or assaulted. The drunk drivers all step out of their cars unscathed.

That's the way collegiate drinking always looks on the screen, whether it's in a bar or a frat house or on a spring-break beach: music blasting, people dancing, cups raised high. The images haven't stopped since *Animal House* was released in 1978: two of this year's biggest box-office hits were the frat-party comedies *Neighbors* and *22 Jump Street*. Our culture provides a detailed instruction

manual for undergraduate alcohol abuse, and students comply with something close to obligation.

The movies don't show what comes next: rape, illness, and tragedy. Scroll down the death list on [CompelledToAct.com](http://CompelledToAct.com)—it takes a while—and the stories start to blend in similarity and repetition. "Lost his life in an automobile accident." "Fell into a ditch near railroad tracks." "Found unresponsive while on spring break." There are no ditch-shrouded corpses in *Neighbors*, because that's not entertainment.

As a result, thousands of young lives are being lost and ruined, and colleges are increasingly being called to account. The federal government's recent high-profile expansion of scrutiny into campus sexual-assault policies is mostly a response to terrible things that happen after excessive drinking.

Colleges can't change Hollywood. But they can increase the distance between those fantastical movie parties and real college life. While fraternities aren't inherently bad (full disclosure: I was in one), it's no secret where the biggest alcohol risks are often found.

Caitlin Flanagan's recent *Atlantic* exposé suggests that some universities are colluding with national fraternal organizations to shift legal liability for alcohol-related damages onto parents' insurance policies. That's reprehensible. Greek organizations exist at the pleasure of colleges, not the other way around. College presidents who bend to pressure from outside groups or alumni with fond, hazy memories of youthful hijinks are failing their most basic obligations to their students. Organizations that are a danger to students should be permanently shut down. The same is true for the parasitical bar owners and party planners. Alcohol abuse will never be eliminated, but there are many lives to be saved between there and where we are now.

Students also drink because they have a lot of time on their hands. Studies have found that today's full-time undergraduates are spending fewer hours on academic work in exchange for better grades than in previous generations. Substance abuse can be a product of aimlessness and boredom, something to do to fill the time.

In the long run, the most effective alcohol-abuse-prevention policy is to be a better college: a place where students are continually challenged, provoked, and engaged by the difficult work of learning.

When my daughter reaches college age, I'm going to look for places that have a reputation of being "where fun goes to die." Better fun than something else.

*Kevin Carey is director of the education-policy program at the New America Foundation and a contributing writer to The Chronicle.*

*Originally published on December 2, 2014*

# How to Be Intoxicated

By ROB GOODMAN

**H**ERE'S a puzzle. Most of what's oldest about us humans is still younger than drinking. From China to Iran to Turkey, the story is in the residue scraped from the insides of broken and buried clay vessels: Before we knew how to build a wheel or stitch a sail, and maybe even before we knew how to bake a loaf of bread, we knew how to make ourselves drunk. And on the earliest tablets of Greek writing, alongside all the other gods, there is Dionysus, god of wine: He seems to be as old as it gets, and with as much claim as any god in the pantheon to be a native.

The puzzle is that whenever the Greeks told themselves stories about the god of wine, they told stories about a god who was new and who was foreign. In myth, Dionysus is always in the process of arriving. He's the newest of the gods, the half-human god with the shakiest title to divinity, the one with the weakest claim to be "one of us." "I was in Phrygia before I came here," the playwright Euripides has him say in *The Bacchae*,

*and Lydia, where the earth flows gold. I passed  
the broiling plains of Persia, and Bactria's  
walled towns. The Medes then, their freezing  
winters,  
then opulent Arabia and down  
along the bitter, salt-sea coast of Asia  
where Hellenes and barbarians mingle.*

Maybe there's a deep cultural memory recorded here, the creeping progress of vines. But maybe there's also a common personal memory. Why new? Because we remember our first drink. Why foreign? Because enough drinks make us foreign to ourselves. And no one has captured that sense of strangeness better than Euripides, whose greatest tragedy imagined a time before history when intoxication simply appeared one day in a sober world, like a dangerous half-god who has just danced into town. I'm sure it's a coincidence that I learned about *The Bacchae* at just about the same

time as I learned how to drink. But I'm fortunate I did.

Across the street from me is another place where drinking is new. Many of the freshmen who wheeled their things across Broadway and into the Columbia dorms just a few months ago brought some experience of drinking with them—but probably not in the volume or freedom that started for them this fall. Universities' engagement with these things is mostly limited to fear of 18-year-olds drinking themselves into the hospital. But fear blinds: How to be intoxicated—not just with alcohol, but with politics, religion, sex, or any of the other kinds of drunkenness that are part of being young—is as much a practice to be learned as any other skill taught in the curriculum, and yet it's one that's almost always taught by accident.

When colleges pick the one book that every new student should read (as they increasingly do through required summer reading programs), they tend to choose something of the recent-social-ills variety. One study found that 97 percent of those common readings come from 1990 or later. There's value, certainly, in many of those choices. But colleges should consider the value in *The Bacchae*, something much older and, in its way, much more uncomfortable. Euripides' play still matters after some 2,500 years because it is the product of a culture and a poet who were far better than we are at imagining themselves into a time when drunkenness was new. There's a refusal in this play to take intoxication for granted. There is an insistence, instead, on seeing it as literally awesome—wonderful and frightening—in a way that seems to join our own adolescence and the far-off adolescence of our culture.

**A**S EURIPIDES TELLS IT, Dionysus is not a god who offers friendship; he is a god who demands recognition. He owns a familiar kind of divine insecurity (compare the God of the Hebrew Bible, so obsessed with ensuring that everyone in a radius of hundreds of miles will "know that I am the Lord"). Dionysus, too, needs

it known that “I am truly god,” and so he has returned to his birthplace after a life of exile that has left him more alien than Greek. He has come back to the city of Thebes, where his mother’s family still believes that he is a human bastard rather than the son of Zeus. In the foreground, his mother’s tomb is still smoldering: She was destroyed in lightning as she gave birth, and the grave goes on smoking through everything that follows, a visible token, writes Martha Nussbaum, “of a contact between civilized human life and what is other than, outside of, civilization.”

*The Bacchae* begins with madness in Thebes. In the town below, the god’s horde of dancing followers shatters the peace; on the mountain above, the town’s women have been struck by what looks like insanity, “stung by Dionysus, from themselves.” The words Euripides puts in their mouths are hallucinatory: “The earth flows, flows beneath us, then / milk flows, and wine flows / and nectar flows, like flame, / like the fire.”

The beardless young man who comes out of the town citadel to stand against Dionysus is Pentheus, the newly crowned king of Thebes. He is the god’s cousin on the human side of the family, though he refuses to acknowledge their kinship. He is also, as one translator noted, the age of a college freshman. He is new to manhood and new to authority, and he wears both uneasily. He speaks the language of obsessive control, over himself and others. “I’ll track them down, all of them,” he blusters about the women. “I’ll have them all in cages.”

Of all the kinds of authority that Dionysus has deranged, it’s control over women that most dominates the young king’s mind. Again and again, in his increasingly feverish sobriety, he imagines how “they fill great bowls of wine, then they creep into the bushes and lie down for lusting men.” “I can see them now, in the bushes,” he tells Dionysus, “little birds, trapped in the toils of love.” He is captivated and repulsed by alcohol, women, and sex—he can’t keep the three distinct in his mind—especially by the fear and the wish that sex might be happening outside his own strictures, outside the right angles of the city and its walls. (A report from the mountain reveals, unsurprisingly, that the sex is happening only in Pentheus’ imagination.) He wants to stop it, to crush it with his army; he wants to join it, to see it with his own eyes. He wants to not be himself.

And that is what the god offers him. Under the thin pretext of strategy—Pentheus should gather intelligence on the women before he destroys them—Dionysus promises to dress him up as a woman and smuggle him into their midst. After a bit of prodding, Pentheus exits with the god, and when he returns, he is smashed (a good time to recall that our metaphors for this sort of thing bear more truth than we think). Pentheus sees two suns and two cities, he sees Dionysus changing shape

from a man to a horned animal, and he stands unsteadily in his full-length dress and wig. The scene isn’t meant to be played for comedy: What we and Dionysus know, but the king doesn’t, is that he is also being dressed as a human sacrifice.

And this, by the way, is another reason to read old books: Just when the play is most likely to offend us moderns—in the suggestion that a man is humiliated by being dressed as a woman—it’s also at its most interesting. Here is a standing reminder that “progressive” and “regressive” fail to come in neat boxes. On the one hand, we have one of the oldest portrayals of political repression as tied to the repression of women’s sexuality, along with Euripides’ insight that the men demanding that repression are terrified. On the other, we have his sneaking suspicion that the terrified king is right: Intoxication, in this play, does turn a man into a woman; it does turn a Greek into a barbarian. I can only suggest that the playwright is falling here into the same error that he wants to attribute to the king. In those moments when he paints intoxication as something fit only for women and men who have “become” women, he is thinking like Pentheus, a young man who can imagine drunkenness only as something that destroys a specific kind of manliness, as a cataclysmic force that threatens to wipe out his identity for good and all. At its best, I think the play can tell us something more humane than that.

What Euripides gets exactly right is a kind of drunken fear that our own memories of adolescence tend to edit out. It’s only old people who say that young people feel “invincible”; it takes a writer of some wisdom to see that youth looks invincible only in retrospect, from the outside. And yes, Dionysus is still the god of this fear. Here’s what David Foster Wallace wrote about his time teaching college English:

You think it’s a coincidence that it’s in college that most Americans do their most serious falling-down drinking and drugging and reckless driving ... and mindless general Dionysian-type reveling? It’s not. They’re adolescents, and they’re terrified, and they’re dealing with their terror in a distinctively American way. Those naked boys hanging upside down out of their frat-house’s windows on Friday night are simply trying to get a few hours’ escape from the stuff that any decent college has forced them to think about all week.

I’d add only that this is all something more than distinctively American. Think of what Pentheus is forced to think about. All of his certainties have fallen to pieces: Of course he wants to go to pieces himself.

When the king re-enters, it is as a basket of

limbs. He has been torn apart by the Bacchae on the mountain—including, horribly, his own mother—who imagined together that he was a wild lion. Dionysus appears one more time to justify himself: “I am a god!” The king’s grandfather answers—and at that moment of confronting the power that has destroyed his family, he is more godlike than the god himself—“Gods should not resemble mortals.”

But, of course, Dionysus does. The god will not stay still. He looks both male and female, both alien and native, both man-shaped and animal: At the height of his drunkenness, Pentheus says, “the double horns sprouting on your forehead: were you an animal before, the way now you’re a bull?” And just as Dionysus is a kind of walking blur, he dissolves the lines that keep one human personality distinct from another. This is why, in *The Bacchae*, intoxicated people claim that the god has freed them, and sober people claim that the god wants to destroy them. Of course, he wants both. His worshipers sing, “I have soared and soar, still, for [him], in / the labor, difficult, difficult and sweet, the / sweet, exacting labor of exalting him, of crying / out for him”—and they sing that he “joyfully devours the living flesh.” He says himself that he is the “fiercest and most sweet” of all the gods.

He is telling the truth. In all of the flux, the single lasting fact about Dionysus remains the one with which the play started: He demands recognition. This is not, in the world of the play, something to celebrate or mourn, it just is. It is a fact about the world. Pentheus is a young man who tries to live against that fact, and living against it tears him apart.

This is not the kind of cautionary tale about drinking that we’re used to, nor is it the familiar reverse-cautionary tale of the Puritan hypocrite. It is harder than those. It’s a story about lives so attached to control that the smallest loss of control destroys them. Against the happily paradoxical god, Pentheus is a man of certainties and fear. Of course he gets smashed offstage, hidden from everyone but the god—have you noticed how much of that fearful kind of drinking happens in dark rooms? There is no middle ground for him: He can conceive of intoxication (of whatever kind) only as a thing that destroys. When intoxication inevitably comes, then, it comes in its destructive aspect, Dionysus as the devourer of flesh rather than the bringer of peace. And I can’t read about Pentheus without thinking of myself at his age, and about the students across the street: Which of their projects of self-control and risk-aversion will turn brittle and come apart at the lightest touch? Which of them will drink for fear instead of joy?

But in the more hopeful words of the god’s followers, there is the possibility that we can live with

the grain of his fact about the world. The best hope of *The Bacchae* is not that we can escape intoxication in all of its forms, but that we can manage it: That applied insanity can keep us sane, open to others, open to wonder—which is, as Plato taught, the beginning of wisdom.

Plato was about the age of Pentheus when *The Bacchae* premiered, and he could well have been in the audience. He seems to have been channeling the play when he taught that “in reality, the greatest of blessings come to us through madness, when it is sent as a gift of the gods.” And yet that qualifier is crucial: Sometimes madness is a saving gift; and sometimes it is just madness. We disorder our brains to keep them in order, with no promise from anyone that this time it will work. All intoxication happens on the edge of a knife, and *The Bacchae* is too honest to tell us otherwise.

**S**O *The Bacchae* is a tragedy. And though our talk about intoxication is usually limited to the cautionary tale or the drinking song, one extreme or another, it is tragedy that is exactly the right register for talking about these things. Not because intoxication is tragic. Not because tragedy means “a bad thing happened”—many bad things happen that are not tragic, and some tragic things happen that fill our hearts with more than grief. But because tragedy so often happens on the ground where irreconcilables collide, and we are forced to choose even in the sure and certain knowledge that all of our choices are flawed. There is a kind of life so closed to intoxication that, even if it could be lived out successfully, would be a constant loss; and there is the openness that brings no guarantees. As Nussbaum puts it, *The Bacchae* teaches us that “any reasonably rich and complete life, sexual or social, is lived in a complex tension between control and yielding, risking always the loss of order.”

How to live inside this tension, how to manage intoxication, is one of the hardest lessons that mark adulthood. It’s also one of the richest. It’s work for the brain and not just the gullet. To divorce that kind of lesson from what’s taught and learned in college is to drive a wedge between what we know and who we are: to relegate thinking about the latter to the world of horrible skits at orientation and Afterschool Specials, or just to leave it unthought as we go on accumulating information. Yet thinking together about how to be adults in the world is “sweet, exacting labor,” if anything is.

*Rob Goodman, co-author of Rome’s Last Citizen (Thomas Dunne Books, 2012), is a Ph.D. student in political science at Columbia University.*

*Originally published on December 5, 2014*

# 6 Campuses and the Booze That Surrounds Them

By ANU NARAYANSWAMY and JUSTIN MYERS

While drinking among college students, both underage and over 21, is common on campuses across the country, each institution faces its own set of circumstances. Some are surrounded by bars; at others, students throw house parties. To greater and lesser extents, some colleges work with their local communities to control drinking and keep students safe.

*The Chronicle* used alcohol-licensing data from more than 30 states to plot the locations of bars, restaurants, and stores where alcohol is sold. See the drinking geography for six campuses and read how each college handles its drinking culture.

## U. of Georgia

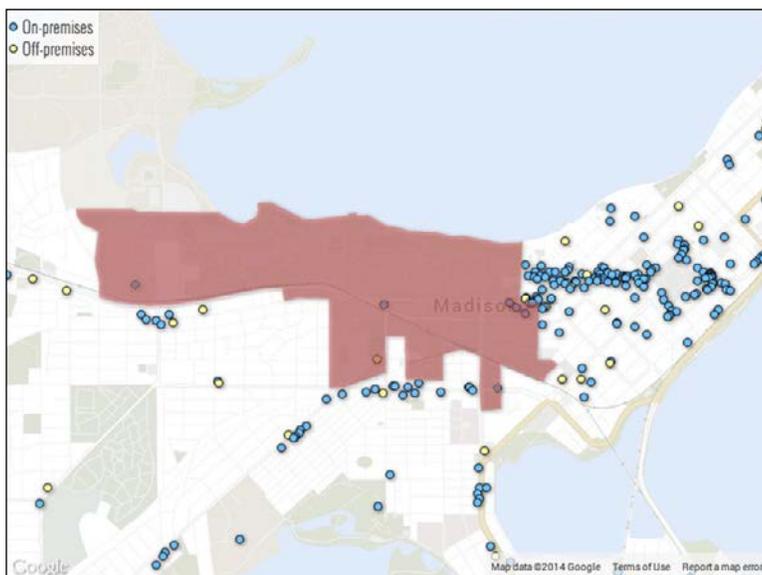
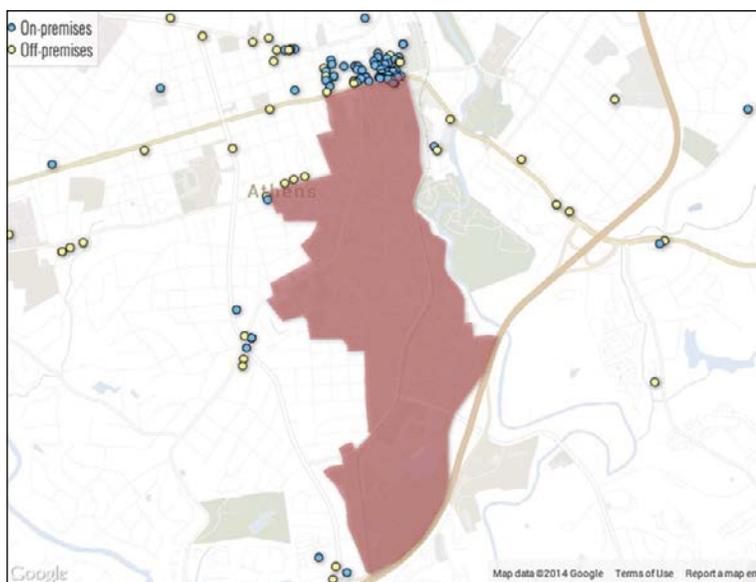
*About 60 places to drink within one-fourth mile*

Students have plenty of options for buying alcohol near the university. But the highest density of bars—more than 50—can be found around the north end of campus.

In the 1980s, the university doubled down on excessive drinking in the Greek system, pushing students to off-campus bars. Because Georgia state law gives the university police jurisdiction within 500 yards of campus, the officers work in tandem with the local police to patrol the area.

Both the university and county are strict on underage drinking, not merely issuing citations but arresting anyone under the age 21 caught with alcohol.

Students operate Designated Dawgs, a service that offers free rides home for students on Thursday and Friday nights, no questions asked. Its budget comes from local businesses such as Leon Farmer & Company, a beer distributor, and from the university's Parents and Families Association.



## U. of Wisconsin at Madison

*About 70 places to drink within one-fourth mile*

Clustered mostly on the east side of campus, places to get a drink engulf the university. Four years ago, the city prohibited new bars in the downtown area by issuing the Alcohol Density Licensing Ordinance. The measure was based on research suggesting a correlation between alcohol consumption and crime.

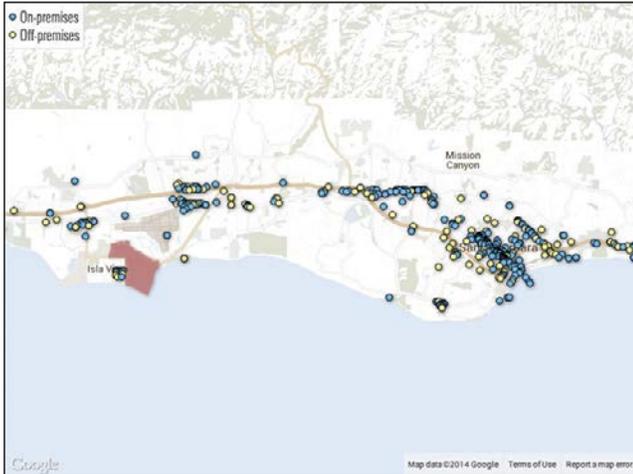
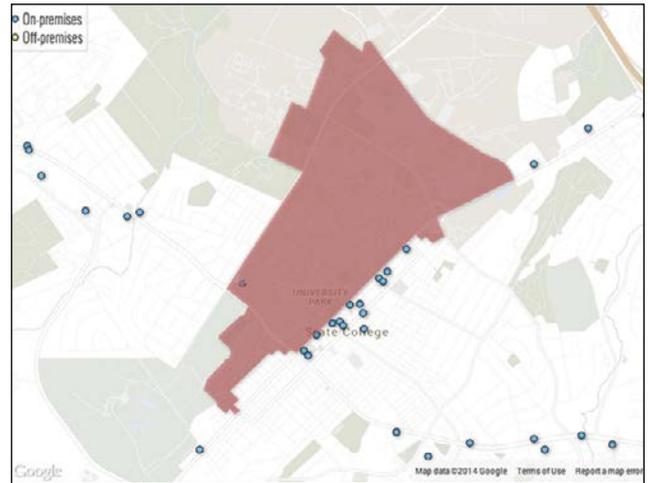
The ordinance failed to have the intended effect on crime, so parts of it were lifted this year. While there's still a restriction on the number of bars downtown, the city will now allow new businesses like arcades and movie theaters to open. "The real problem," says Sarah A. Van Orman, executive director of University Health Services, was that the downtown area "was already saturated with bars."

To help manage drinking among students, the university has a representative on the local Alcohol Licensing Review Committee, to work with bar owners to prevent underage drinking and limit enticements like drink specials.

## Pennsylvania State U.

About 15 places to drink within one-fourth mile

A lot of drinking at Penn State revolves around sporting events. On game days, popular bars like Otto's Pub and Brewery tend to do brisk business, despite being more than two miles from the campus. The university has worked closely with local businesses to try to control the fallout. Negotiations among students, campus officials, and bar owners, for example, led to incentives for bars not to sell alcohol on "State Patty's Day," an alternative to St. Patrick's Day, says Damon Sims, vice president for student affairs.



## U. of California at Santa Barbara

About 10 places to drink within one-fourth mile

With few bars nearby, students at Santa Barbara mostly drink at house parties.

"It depends on the age," says Melissa Boomer, a junior. "Students of all ages drink, she says, "but once they are of legal age, they go downtown." They often take the "drunk-bus," a privately run shuttle that picks students up two blocks from the campus. University and local police collaborate for celebrations like Halloween and "Deltopia," a spring-break party that turned violent this year.

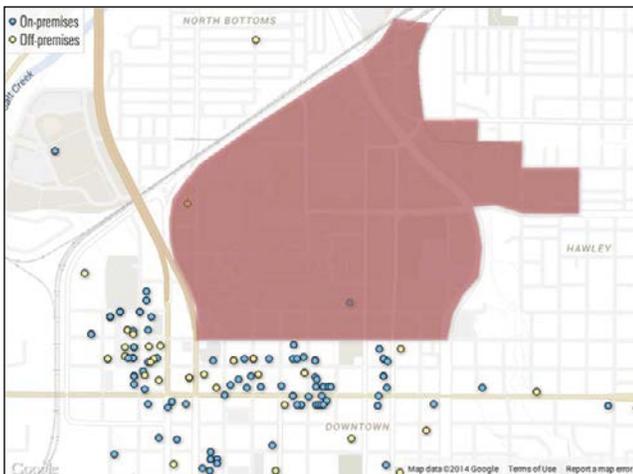
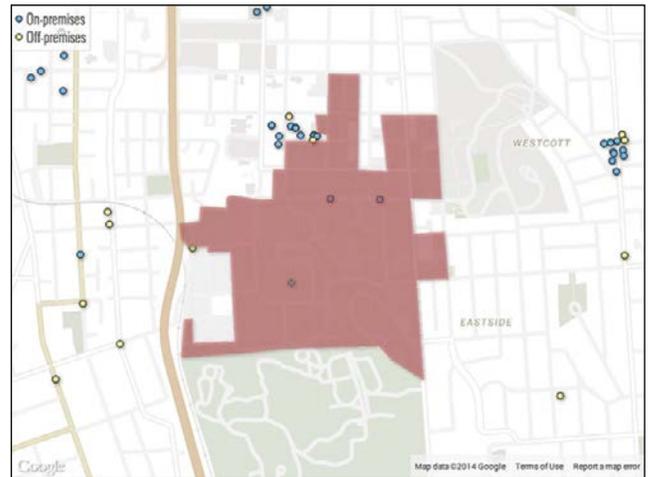
## Syracuse U.

About 15 places to drink within one-fourth mile

Syracuse has relatively few bars within walking distance of the campus. Drinking is more centered around fraternities and off-campus houses, enough that Syracuse is the reigning No. 1 party school, according to The Princeton Review.

Drinking is an important part of the culture, says Emma Edwards, a senior. "It's not the only thing people do, but a high priority among some is to get drunk over the weekend." Within a mile of campus, more than three dozen stores sell alcohol.

Until last semester, students would congregate at an off-campus housing complex, Castle Court. But this fall the administrations of the university and housing complex agreed to end the parking-lot parties, to much protest.



## U. of Nebraska at Lincoln

About 100 places to drink within one-fourth mile

Beverages are sold and served in a cluster just south of Nebraska's flagship campus. For about 20 years, the university has worked with the local government, the police, and a community coalition called the Responsible Hospitality Council to spot problems and improve safety. The council distributes data from a local detox center on where patients had their last drink. The university's comprehensive approach is considered a national model.

Originally published on December 1, 2014

# The Case of the ‘Stupid Drunk’

By ERIC HOOVER



ANDREW SHURTLEFF, ZUMAPRESS.COM, NEWS.COM

Alcohol figured prominently in the life of George Huguely V, who was convicted of killing his onetime girlfriend. His friends at the U. of Virginia worried about his excessive drinking but did not interfere.

**W**E KNOW HIM all too well. We see him in class, on the field, at the bar, and in our living rooms. He’s the “stupid drunk.”

Recently Francis McQ. Lawrence, a defense lawyer, used those words to describe his client George Huguely V, a former student at the University of Virginia. Last week a jury convicted Mr. Huguely of second-degree murder, and sentenced him to 26 years in prison for the death of Yeardeley Love, his onetime girlfriend, in

2010, days before both were to graduate.

The verdict followed a two-week trial in which alcohol played a significant role. Mr. Huguely’s story reveals the awful paradox of heavy drinking: Even as it unleashes terrible behavior in one man, it so often turns his friends into bystanders, unwilling or unable to help, assuming that they even see a problem at all.

On May 2, 2010, Mr. Huguely drank—a lot—in the company of others, according to trial testimony. He started drinking in the morning and then

went golfing with some teammates and their fathers. He continued drinking on a golf course, where he became incoherent. He drank more at dinner with his father and his teammates. He drank more with his friends back at his apartment.

After kicking his way through Ms. Love's door later that night, Mr. Huguely told police that he had grabbed her neck, shaken her, and wrestled her to the floor. She hit her head against a wall, he said. She was bleeding, but alive, he said, when he left her apartment. Prosecutors argued that Mr. Huguely intended to kill Ms. Love; the defense countered that he had "contributed" to her death, but that he had neither killed her nor intended to do so.

In Ms. Love's bedroom, investigators found a letter Mr. Huguely had sent to Ms. Love following an earlier incident in which he put her in a chokehold. "Alcohol is ruining my life," it said. "I'm scared to know that I can get that drunk to the point where I cannot control how I act."

Mr. Lawrence painted Mr. Huguely as the lesser of two monsters—a big-time boozier, a rock-head who played lacrosse, but not a calculating killer. This was a desperate tactic, but not a surprising one. Prosecutors had sought a first-degree murder conviction, and in Virginia intoxication can be used as a defense against premeditated murder. In the end, alcohol did not absolve Mr. Huguely, but it almost certainly limited his punishment.

Throughout the trial, the defense sought to put Mr. Huguely's behavior into some kind of context, to render the world he inhabited as a booze-soaked barrel of misbehavior. During the trial, Mr. Lawrence described the neighborhood where Mr. Huguely and Ms. Love resided as a "twenty-something ghetto" and a "lacrosse ghetto," and a "student ghetto." The G-word, loaded like few others in the vernacular, played on a widespread perception of colleges.

"The lawyers correctly intuited that jurors around the country are looking at college culture and saying it's a sleaze pit," says Peter F. Lake, director of the Center for Excellence in Higher Education Law and Policy at Stetson University. "The idea that people get influenced by their environment, or that the environment accelerates

the crime, if you get that into their heads, it can influence their thinking. It suggests to them that he's a victim of the culture he was in."

## BOOZE AND BYSTANDERS

In the end, nobody called Mr. Huguely a victim. One juror told *The Washington Post* that he found the defense's closing argument (which included the "stupid drunk" phrase) offensive: The lawyer "was basically saying boys will be boys. I don't think that's an excuse."

As unpalatable as this narrative might seem, however, it reminds us that Mr. Huguely had an audience when he held a bottle. His drinking and his recklessness were no mystery to those around him. During the trial, friends and teammates testified that they had noticed Mr. Huguely's drinking become more and more intense during his senior year, and that he was getting wasted several times a week. Some friends and teammates said that just before Ms. Love's death, they had dis-

cussed holding an intervention for Mr. Huguely.

Like many colleges, Virginia has embraced "bystander intervention" programs, which train students how to recognize signs of problems in their peers, and how to handle difficult conversations that often follow a confrontation. "It's easy to judge college students, but even when they're seeing something, it's hard to act," says Susan Bruce, director of substance-abuse prevention at Virginia.

Moreover, students who drink heavily might

hesitate to say something about a friend's drinking for fear that they will sound like hypocrites. Students often regret not acting, but some who have acted are stung by the memory of doing so. "We have college students who say, We don't speak up anymore because they lost a good friend in high school" after confronting them, Ms. Bruce says. "They may lack the skills that come with an understanding of the psychology" of drinking.

To give students those skills, Virginia adopted the Step UP! program several years ago. The program was designed to help students talk effectively to someone who's struggling, with alcohol or anything else, and learn how to best express their concern and their commitment to help. Previously, only athletes received this intervention training, which was developed at the University of

**"We don't want students to feel that they are or have to be responsible for others' behaviors."**

Arizona. Following Ms. Love's death, a student-led group has helped expand the program to nonathletes.

Ms. Bruce believes the program has great promise, but she describes bystander intervention as a delicate issue. "We don't want students to feel that they are or have to be responsible for others' behaviors," she says. "These are very difficult things to ask of anyone. We focus a lot on bystanders, but we don't want to blame the bystander either. We really walk a line."

That line can be hard to see. As an undergraduate student at Virginia, I once helped carry a friend, half-conscious and full of bourbon, up to his room after a party. Eventually, this scene became routine. A small group of us would take off our friend's shoes and tuck him into bed, rolling him on to his side so he would not choke on his vomit. He lost control of his Fridays and Saturdays, and, ultimately, everything else. He started throwing drunken punches at strangers. Sometimes, in his stupor, he peed his pants.

We worried about him, we lectured him, but we

did little else. Not because we didn't care about him, but because we didn't know what to do. Also, we were scared. Not so much of getting him in trouble as of alienating him to the point that he would push away those of us who, in our own limited way, looked after him when the music stopped and the bars shut down. He was one of the smartest guys I ever met; he was also a stupid drunk just like Mr. Huguely.

Make no mistake. Last week's verdict was about a young woman who died and a young man who, even if he did not intend to snuff out her life, behaved violently, shamefully, and, perhaps, unforgivably. That's why he will most likely stay behind bars for the next two decades.

But what of the "stupid drunk" who's still out there, walking the campus, walking the town? Wherever he goes, we can bet there are friends and roommates, girlfriends and boyfriends, parents and teammates, orbiting him closely, day after day, week after week, almost saying something, almost doing something, or almost thinking something's wrong. What do we call them?

*Originally published on February 26, 2012*

# Why Campuses Can't Talk About Alcohol When It Comes to Sexual Assault



TAMIKA MOORE FOR THE CHRONICLE

Administrators fear that if sexual-assault prevention programs focus on how much students drink, victims will be blamed—and blame themselves.

By **ROBIN WILSON**

**A**T THE BEGINNING of every academic year, college freshmen are quickly introduced to two hallmarks of campus social life, drinking and hooking up.

But while statistics show that alcohol and sex can be a dangerous combination—at least half of students involved in alleged sexual assaults were drinking—campus officials are reluctant to put the two in the same sentence.

“The discussion of alcohol and sexual violence is the third rail of discourse,” says Christopher P. Krebs, a senior social-science researcher for the company RTI International who has studied the effects of alcohol on sexual assault. “It’s something no one wants to go near.”

Preventing sexual assault is at the top of the agenda on many campuses, but the people in charge of keeping students safe feel they can't say much about alcohol, even though it is a common element in many incidents. In discussing the dangers of sexual assault, administrators fear that if they counsel students to drink less, young women who get drunk and are assaulted will be blamed—and blame themselves. They may then not report the attacks to their colleges, and not get the help they need.

"The first things we hear are 'What was she wearing?' and 'How much alcohol did she drink?'" says Darcie Folsom, director of sexual-violence prevention and advocacy at Connecticut College. "But those are not causing a sexual assault to happen. The perpetrator is the problem here." As part of a separate effort, Ms. Folsom says, the director of wellness at the college already talks to students—most of whom are underage—about high-risk drinking.

A former college president discovered last month just how volatile it can be to relate alcohol and sexual assault. Stephen Joel Trachtenberg, president emeritus of George Washington University, suggested as a guest on a National Public Radio show that college women could protect themselves by drinking less. The remarks caused an immediate uproar on GW's campus and beyond.

"While we understand the desire to help women stay safe, this perspective puts the onus of stopping sexual assault on women," students in the Trachtenberg School of Public Policy and Public Administration wrote in a letter to the former president. "It also does not work."

Mr. Trachtenberg says he was chastened by the negative reaction but surprised that counseling sobriety could be so controversial. "Someone who is drunk," he wrote in response to the students, "is more vulnerable to attack."

### ENFORCING THE TABOO

In the past year, colleges have come under increasing pressure to properly deal with reports of sexual assault. They have a legal obligation to resolve such reports promptly and fairly, penalizing those found responsible. If the institutions mishandle the reports, they may be found in violation of the gender-equity law known as Title IX, according to the U.S. Department of Education.

As a result, many campuses are going on the offensive—offering educational programs, often online courses, that warn about the dangers of sexual assault and tell students how to prevent it. Soon, under new federal regulations, such training will be mandatory.

But most programs don't focus on students' decisions, including how much to drink. One reason is that, for 15 years, the Department of Justice has

run a grant program that serves as a major source of funds to colleges developing resources for sexual-assault prevention. Campus efforts considered "out of scope" for the grants include programs that "focus primarily on alcohol and substance abuse," the grant program says online. It points administrators away from an emphasis on "changing victim behavior."

Kathleen A. Bogle learned that alcohol could be off limits when she tried to deliver a talk several years ago called "Hooking Up, Alcohol, and Sexual Assault: Understanding the Connections and Reducing the Problem." It was for a meeting sponsored by the Justice Department's Office on Violence Against Women, and federal officials asked Ms. Bogle, an associate professor of sociology and criminal justice at La Salle University, to remove the word "alcohol" from the title. Focusing on how much students drink, they said, leads to blaming victims.

"This starts to censor how we can talk about the issue," says Ms. Bogle. "I don't think you are doing young women any favors by saying, 'We're not going to tell you that this happens—and be careful about it.'"

Most sexual assaults happen after women voluntarily consume alcohol; relatively few occur after they have been given alcohol or drugs without their knowledge, according to an article in the *Journal of American College Health* in 2009 by Mr. Krebs and other researchers. Yet sexual-assault-prevention programs, it says, "seldom emphasize the important link between women's use of substances ... and becoming a victim of sexual assault."

But some form of that message could help, Antonia Abbey, a professor of social psychology at Wayne State University who studies violence against women, has argued. "The fact that women's alcohol consumption may increase their likelihood of experiencing sexual assault does not make them responsible for the man's behavior," she wrote in an article in 2002 in the *Journal of Studies on Alcohol*. "Being intoxicated allows women to let down their guard and focus on their desire to have fun and be liked rather than on their personal safety," she wrote. "Such information may empower women when used in prevention programs."

On most campuses, however, education about sexual violence does not center on how students can lower their risk of assault by changing their own behavior. "What we steer our campuses away from is anything that says someone experienced gender violence because they had been drinking," says Joan Masters, coordinator of a statewide coalition of colleges in Missouri called Partners in Prevention. "Even if a student is sitting in a residence-hall room, gender violence can happen to them."

Instead, many campus programs focus on "by-

stander intervention,” or teaching students how they can help their friends stay safe at parties and in other situations. It’s an easier message for students to hear, say campus administrators, and doesn’t result in blaming those who get drunk and are assaulted.

“They are taught to notice when something might be harmful to their friends and distract someone and get them away,” says Ms. Masters. “Part of the conversation is ‘We need to keep our friends safe,’ and by doing that, we also learn how to keep ourselves safe.”

The importance of gaining consent in sexual encounters is another point campus programs stress. “As far as assault prevention, we want to think about understanding what consent is, and that a person has the right to deny consent in a situation,” says Connie J. Kirkland, manager of the sexual-assault services program at Northern Virginia Community College. “If somebody pushes the limits, that is the time to get out of Dodge or ask for help.”

When campus officials do warn students about the role of alcohol in sexual assault, they frequently describe how a perpetrator may use it to wheedle consent out of a victim, or to get her too drunk to defend herself.

“Sexual predators weaponize alcohol,” explains Peter F. Lake, director of the Center for Excellence in Higher Education Law and Policy at Stetson University. “Your typical sexual predator will stage an attack and place alcohol where it’s heavily camouflaged, in sweet drinks.”

### **‘SELF-INFLICTED’ FEAR**

While administrators see it as their job to help shape students’ social behavior, undergraduates are hardly a blank slate when they come to college. Most have already absorbed messages about alcohol and sex—from parents, high-school health teachers, friends, and the media.

Ayushi Roy, who graduated in May from Colum-

bia University, says her parents warned her before her freshman year to be careful about drinking—and she was. “I was a very square, obedient child,” she says. “I went from a California suburb to the middle of New York City. I was hyper-aware of my environment and very cautious.”

But she grew to resent feeling as if she had to monitor her behavior because of what others might do to her, says Ms. Roy, a volunteer for Know Your IX, a network of self-identified survivors and allies. “The cost of any form of self-policing—not walking alone in the dark, watching what you drink and what you wear—is that you live under a self-inflicted form of fear,” she says. “You are living in this fear that drinking or letting yourself go is a bad thing.”

Her friend and classmate Marybeth Seitz-Brown agrees. “All of this sends the message that it’s the responsibility of women not to get raped,” she says, “rather than the responsibility of everyone not to hurt other people.”

But some students are willingly vigilant. Angela Acosta, who graduated in May from George Mason University, says she was careful “never to go to the extreme that I couldn’t talk, walk, or do anything” when it came to drinking. “My parents made sure I knew my limits,” she says, “and how important that was. They said, ‘You will lose control over yourself, and you need to keep yourself safe, especially if you are in an environment you aren’t familiar with.’”

That’s just good advice, says Caroline Kitchens, a 2012 graduate of Duke University who now writes about sexual assault as a senior research associate at the American Enterprise Institute. “In a perfect world, women would be able to do whatever they want,” she says. But the world isn’t perfect. “There are always evil people out there, people who want to take advantage of women,” she says. “If they exist, we have to practice some common-sense risk reduction.”

It’s too bad, she says, campuses aren’t delivering that message.

*Originally published on September 4, 2014*

# Despite Alcohol Crackdown, the Party Goes On

By ROBIN WILSON

**E**ARLY THIS SEMESTER, Jonathan C. Gibraltar traveled to Washington, D.C., to accept an award for cracking down on student drinking at Frostburg State University. But within days, Mr. Gibraltar, Frostburg's president, was already wondering whether he should give it back.

The night after Mr. Gibraltar returned from Washington, a Frostburg freshman landed in the hospital with alcohol poisoning. The 18-year-old had been drinking Everclear grain alcohol mixed with juice at an off-campus party and nearly died.

"I actually had the feeling I didn't deserve the award," says Mr. Gibraltar, who was chosen over 17 other college presidents for the national honor bestowed by higher-education associations and anti-drinking organizations.

What happened at Frostburg illustrates how difficult it is to wipe out dangerous drinking on college campuses even when the president makes it a top priority. Since Mr. Gibraltar came to this rural campus in the Appalachians two years ago, he has tried to erase its party-school image. He has cracked down on boisterous off-campus parties, reached out to city police — who have stepped up their patrols — and written letters to parents and students about the problem. His goal is to reduce underage and binge drinking.

"I'm not a vigilante against alcohol," he says. "I just don't want a student to die."

Students here are well aware of Mr. Gibraltar's campaign. But they say that while they may be quieter now about their partying — holding smaller gatherings with friends as opposed to big, open-door bashes — they are drinking just as much as they ever have. Alcohol, they say, is simply part of college life. And they doubt that President Gibraltar or anyone else can do much to change that.

"It used to be you'd pay \$3 at the door and in five minutes, you were down drinking in the basement," says Andrew, a senior, explaining the house-party scene before Mr. Gibraltar became president. "Now,

at parties you only let in people you know. If kids are looking to have fun and drink, they're gonna do it whatever way is possible."

## THE 'BURG

Frostburg is one of 11 four-year colleges in the University System of Maryland. Known to students as "the 'Burg," it is a campus that many have chosen as a last resort, when their grades and standardized-test scores haven't been good enough to qualify them for the state's flagship, the University of Maryland at College Park.

Located less than a mile off Interstate 68, which runs through rural western Maryland and on into West Virginia, Frostburg sits at an elevation of 2,070 feet and can get 50 inches of snow a year. Many of the students here are outdoor enthusiasts, and it isn't unusual to see an undergraduate practicing his bow-hunting on a life-size replica of a deer.

Because of its remote location, though, students say there is not much to do at night besides party. The university, with its 5,215 students, is the biggest thing happening in the town. Pittsburgh, the nearest large city, is 100 miles away. There is a tiny movie theater here, a few stores on Main Street, and a half-dozen bars within walking distance of the campus.

The major social scene takes place on a few streets just off the campus, where most of the university's upperclassmen live in closely spaced rental homes.

It was outside a party at one of those houses on Maple Street where a local man was nearly killed in September 2006, a month after Mr. Gibraltar began his presidency here. The 45-year-old man was walking home from work when he was punched in the face by a student who walked out of the party. The man fell backwards and smacked his head on the curb. He went to the hospital in critical condition, and for a while Mr. Gibraltar

and others on the campus thought he might die.

The next weekend, local police raided another off-campus party that was overflowing with students, issuing 86 citations for underage drinking.

Mr. Gibraltar says he was stunned by the two incidents. He hadn't known much about the party scene at Frostburg before he came. But he was haunted by the memory of a fatal alcohol-fueled incident in 1989.

Back then, he was an assistant professor of social science at the State University of New York A&T College at Morrisville, and his wife ran an alcohol-prevention program for students there. She told him that the college's president needed to do something to stem student drinking or someone would die. Mr. Gibraltar relayed her concerns to the president. But a few weeks later, one of Mr. Gibraltar's own students fatally slashed another student with a knife at an off-campus party where both of them had been drinking.

"I knew I would never see him again," Mr. Gibraltar says of his student, "and his life would never be the same."

## ZERO TOLERANCE

Now that he is president of Frostburg, Mr. Gibraltar is determined not to let something like that happen on his watch. He admits that right after the incidents in September 2006, his first impulse was to make Frostburg alcohol-free. "I have the authority and the ability and the will to do that," he says.

But he didn't want to punish the entire student population because of the actions of a smaller number of students. And besides, he says, "I don't believe that completely outlawing alcohol would change the situation for students who binge drink."

In fact, some college presidents think the wisest move may be to lower the drinking age. More than 100 of them have joined a campaign called the Amethyst Initiative, saying colleges' efforts to combat underage drinking just aren't working and have actually encouraged "a culture of dangerous, clandestine 'binge drinking.'"

But Mr. Gibraltar, who didn't endorse the Amethyst Initiative, says he isn't ready to give up trying to combat underage drinking. After the incidents here in 2006, the president responded forcefully. He issued a "zero tolerance" policy for underage and binge drinking both on and off the campus.

And he held a universitywide forum to explain the policy, which states that all drinking infractions, even those that students commit off the campus, will be prosecuted through the campus's judicial system, and that students' parents will be informed. The university has stepped up communication with local police so that, unlike in

the past, it now learns of all off-campus infractions.

Students weren't happy with the new rules, and one of them stood up during the forum to tell Mr. Gibraltar so. "He said, 'I came to Frostburg State because I knew it was OK to drink here, and if you are going to crack down on that, I'm going to leave and I'm going to tell my friends not to come here,'" the president remembers. Mr. Gibraltar says it took all his reserve not to respond: "There's the door."

The president also regularly talks to first-year students and their parents during freshmen orientation. "I stand in front of them and say, This is what's going to happen: 1,700 students nationwide are going to die from alcohol abuse this year and are never going to come home."

That kind of involvement by a president is unusual, and it is part of what won Mr. Gibraltar the leadership award. But Brandon Busteded, founder of Outside the Classroom, a company that combats high-risk drinking, and which helped sponsor the award, isn't surprised that Frostburg still has trouble with alcohol. "Even on campuses that are doing some of the best work," he says, "the issue is still such a big problem that all of us are a heartbeat away from potential disaster."

## PROGRESS HAS BEEN MADE

Frostburg has seen some progress since Mr. Gibraltar took over as president. Off-campus alcohol citations have decreased by nearly 40 percent — from 245 in the 2006-7 academic year to 150 in 2007-8. Administrators have successfully encouraged the local Liquor Control Board to pressure some bar owners to stop offering all-you-can-drink specials.

And by working with law-enforcement and local civic groups, which now check with the university before agreeing to rent their buildings to Frostburg students for large parties, the university has been able to stop some beerfests before they begin.

*The Chronicle* did talk with some students who say they don't spend their free time drinking. Melinda Croft is a senior and president of the Burg Peer Education Network, which promotes alternatives to drinking. She turned 21 last month, and, like every year, she spent her birthday at a Denny's restaurant, which serves no alcohol. She and her friends don't need alcohol to have fun, she says: "We listen to music, watch movies, and just hang out."

But Mr. Gibraltar knows many students here aren't like Ms. Croft. He is reminded of that every morning on his drive to the campus, where he sees beer cans overflowing in the trash bags outside homes on Bowery Street.

Earlier this semester, a *Chronicle* reporter spent

a Thursday evening talking with students at their houses along Bowery Street and at the Acropolis Restaurant & Lounge, which locals call the Diamond Lounge, on Main Street. Although most agreed to give only their first names, they were open and friendly and eager to explain the effect they thought Mr. Gibraltar's campaign has had on their social lives.

Brent, who is in his fifth year as an undergraduate at Frostburg, says he hasn't changed his drinking habits at all. And he offers a quick chronology of his day to prove it. He had a beer with his cereal at 9 a.m., he says, then watched Pure Country music videos on TV, then went to his first class of the day — advanced finance. At 12:30 he chugged a Keystone Light beer, then another, then went to a lab at 1 p.m. After that, he says, he downed six more beers before going to his advanced tax class at 3:30. In the early evening, he played Frisbeer, a drinking game. By the time Brent meets a Chronicle reporter around 7 p.m., he figures he has had around 16 beers and a whiskey drink.

While Brent is relating his day, Mark, a 22-year-old wearing a black North Face jacket, is waiting to talk about an incident last spring that nearly got him kicked out of the university. Frostburg took students on a sightseeing trip to New York City, and on the bus ride there, Mark and a buddy each drank a fifth of vodka. In New York, he says, "we got off the bus and started buying beer and chugging." The young men proceeded to do the same on the way home until the bus driver, who had warned them to stop, pulled the vehicle over somewhere in Pennsylvania and called the police. Mark and his friend got off the bus and wandered into a neighborhood. (Mr. Gibraltar remembers the incident well, including the telephone call he got at 3 a.m., saying the young men were missing.) Mark is now on academic probation.

#### **'NEVER ANY BLOWOUTS'**

While it is clear that drinking antics have continued even since Mr. Gibraltar's crackdown, some students here say some things have changed. It used to be, they say, that students would get fliers under their residence-hall doors advertising keg parties.

"You used to know where you were going to go party," says Greg, who is wearing an Alaskan Brewing Company T-shirt and sitting on his porch when a Chronicle reporter comes by. "Everyone would be there, and you were pushing your way through to the beer. Now it's word-of-mouth, and

there are never any blowouts."

Cops circle the neighborhood here in the evenings — a police car goes by about every 10 to 15 minutes while the reporter talks with students on Bowery. But the students say as long as they aren't on the sidewalk or in the street with an open can of beer, the police won't bother them.

"It's not the keg sitting on the sidewalk anymore," says Mark, the student on academic probation. "It's inside now, with the door closed."

Students here acknowledge they drink a lot, but several contend it doesn't jeopardize their academic work. "I have a 3.4, but I still have a really good time," says Andrew, the 21-year-old senior who is sitting on his porch with friends. "I have a paper due tomorrow for advanced English comp. I'll write it tonight, in an hour or two." Andrew and his friends offer the reporter a glass of orange soda and vodka while they talk, as country music plays in the background.

Up the hill on Main Street outside the Diamond Lounge, three sophomore girls are standing around in short black dresses. They had gotten inside the bar earlier using fake ID's.

Caroline, a 19-year-old blonde with a tongue stud, says she came to Frostburg knowing about its reputation. "In high school I partied," she says. "That's what I was used to."

Her friend Kaila, a 19-year-old psychology major, says she came to Frostburg from her home, in Baltimore, "because it was the farthest away I could get from home and still live in Maryland."

But then Brittany, a 19-year-old business major, pipes up. She doesn't want the reporter to think that she and her friends aren't serious students. "We make sure drinking doesn't affect our schoolwork," she says. "And we vote." Kaila and Caroline agree. "I'm a great American girl," adds Caroline.

On Thursday nights, the Diamond Lounge sells nine-ounce cups of beer for 10 cents each. Inside the bar, the basement is packed with students who have written their names in black marker on clear plastic cups. Chris, a 21-year-old business-marketing major, takes a look around and tells a reporter that about a quarter of the students he sees are underage.

Since Mr. Gibraltar came, says Chris, students at Frostburg have become smarter about drinking. "Partying hasn't stopped," he says, "it's just changed." After all, the students who come to Frostburg "got just good-enough grades in high school to get by," he says. "Those are the people who party, and those people are all here now."

"Nobody will ever stop this."

*Originally published on December 5, 2008*

# How One University Works Creatively to Fight Risky Drinking

By BETH MCMURTRIE

MARK KAUZLARICH FOR THE CHRONICLE

Police officers make their presence known outside bars near the campus of the U. of Missouri at Columbia. The university has met with bar owners regularly to try to cut down on underage drinking.



**T**RYING to reduce high-risk drinking among college students is a never-ending process. New freshmen arrive, hot spots change, staff members move on. All of that requires nimble thinking. While the University of Missouri at Columbia may not have solved the problem, its progress over time shows how years of dedication can pay off.

The campus has plenty of challenges: a hard-partying student body that rallies around athletics and fraternities, a thriving bar scene, and a lot of off-campus housing. In the past decade, enrollment has rocketed from 28,000 to more than 35,000, driven mainly by undergraduates. Most of them live off campus, concentrated in newly built apartment complexes.

The university's Greek system draws one in four students, and the Tigers' move to the Southeastern Conference plus a winning football record have brought more fans to tailgates. Downtown Columbia is another attraction, with dozens of bars and clubs within walking distance of the campus.

None of those elements are unique to Missouri. Most large public colleges are trying, to some extent, to limit dangerous drinking. They know the risks: poor academic performance, alcohol poisoning, accidents, sexual assault.

So how can a college really make a difference? Kim Dude, associate director of student life and head of the Wellness Resource Center at Missouri, has been asking that question for a very long time. She opened the center in 1990 on a shoestring budget. Focused on alcohol as well as areas like stress and sleep, it has grown, through grants and university support, to eight full-time staff members and 12 graduate assistants. In recent years, the center and a much broader team of campus and community members have been able to reduce some risky behavior, like binge drinking, underage drinking, wild tailgates, and roaring neighborhood parties.

The university takes a carrot-and-stick approach, educating students on safe partying while increasing enforcement of laws and policies. Ms. Dude brings together disparate groups like the Columbia City Council, neighborhood residents, and police officers to tackle the complex problem. The athletic director calls her "a terrific head coach for all of us on campus."

Ms. Dude is more measured. "None of this has ever been easy," she says. "I have hit my head against the wall many times."

## THE BAR SCENE

One early failure paved the way to later success. In the early 1990s, Ms. Dude met with a group of local bar owners and asked them to limit cheap drink specials. Price floors would benefit everyone, she said, with fewer intoxicated students, less

police involvement, and more money for the bars.

The owners balked, telling her and the local press that she couldn't run their businesses. "Kim took a lot of heat for what she did," recalls Richard King, a longtime club owner in town. "The crazy thing about it is if anyone bothered to sit and listen to numbers she threw out, you'd be like, Wow." But that sensible message got blurred, he says. "It sounded like: Shut down the party."

Ms. Dude realized she needed to work on relationships before regulation. So she formed the Access to Alcohol Action Team in 1995, drawing together administrators, campus and local police officers, business owners, and others. She began holding yearly meetings with bar and club owners. And she credits those relationships with some key changes.

The first was a reduction in the number of underage students who got into bars. In 2005, four in 10 students surveyed said they got in underage because nobody had checked IDs. That figure dropped to one in 10 in 2011. It wasn't just that more bar owners were paying attention; the police also stepped up enforcement, including compliance checks.

Two years ago, the city council got behind one of Ms. Dude's longstanding goals and began requiring "mandatory server training" to help prevent underage drinking and intoxication.

## HOUSE PARTIES

With more students renting property, the university hired its first full-time coordinator of off-campus student services, Dionne George, in 2012. She acts as a liaison with apartment-complex owners, who must abide by the university's rules to appear at housing fairs or advertise in its off-campus-living magazine.

One of those rules is to stay in good standing with a nuisance-party ordinance the City Council enacted in 2006, another achievement of the alcohol team. Anyone who holds an out-of-control party can be fined \$500 to \$2,000, with second offenders subject to higher amounts. Landlords are on the hook as well: If a tenant gets caught throwing three nuisance parties within a certain period, their certificate of compliance can be revoked, leaving them unable to rent out that unit for up to a full year.

The number of nuisance-party violations peaked in 2010, at 208, says Officer Melvin Buckner, of the Columbia Police Department. Last year it fell to a low of 57. Some of that decline could be because students clustered in large complexes are less likely to complain about their classmates than local homeowners might be, says Officer Buckner. But the fines are an important incentive, he thinks, to keep bad behavior at bay.

Apartment-complex owners with properties on



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In downtown Columbia, just blocks from the U. of Missouri campus, an ambulance arrives outside a bar to take a young woman to the hospital while other partiers stream past.

other campuses tell Ms. George that Missouri is unusual in hiring a liaison. “The role that I play, most universities don’t have. So it’s awkward and almost intrusive,” she says with a laugh. “But I don’t care.”

### TAILGATING

The athletic director, Mike Alden, remembers the day about 10 years ago when he was walking toward Faurot Field two hours before a football game, and streams of fans were headed in the opposite direction. That’s when he discovered Frat Pit.

Every big college seems to have such a thing: a field or parking lot taken over by tailgaters intent on having the longest, loudest, biggest party. Frat Pit had become a giant headache for the campus by then. Many of the revelers never even went to the game.

In 2007 the alcohol team put them on notice and invited in the media. The idea was to convince boosters, alumni, faculty members, and students

that tailgating needed more oversight. It can be embarrassing to publicize bad behavior, says Mr. Alden, but “we had to allow that image that says, Man, this isn’t cool.”

When the university shut down the party, the drinking moved down the street, to Reactor Field. Officials cracked down there, too. “It was like a virus that was moving here, to here, to here,” Mr. Alden recalls.

Administrators and campus police officers worked for years to find the right approach. They made more rules, tinkered with the ones people found too restrictive, and promoted a more positive image of Missouri fans.

The alcohol team sent faculty and staff members out to monitor tailgates and put up placards highlighting survey findings, like that most fans have at most four drinks per game — “subliminal messages,” Mr. Alden says, to reinforce good behavior. (It’s a technique many colleges use, called social norming, to persuade students that binge drinking is not as common as they might think.)

Too few institutions try to regulate tailgating,

says Mr. Alden, because they think it will drive people away. “Our attendance has never been higher, our fan base has never been better, our concession sales have never been better,” he says. “Don’t turn a blind eye to it, because I think all of us have a tendency to do that.”

### REALITY CHECK

If all of that makes it sound as if Missouri has dangerous drinking under control, it doesn’t. Ms. Dude and her team would be the first to admit that. Yes, the share of students who say they regularly consume four to five drinks in a row — the definition of binge drinking — has declined from nearly 60 percent in 1990 to about 41 percent today. But that means four in 10 students still drink a lot. Fraternity brothers party even harder: More than six in 10 regularly binge-drink. And about 10 students each week, Ms. Dude says, end up in the emergency room with alcohol poisoning.

Downtown, penny pitchers and bottomless cups are as ubiquitous as ever. The City Council has yet to support restrictions on drink specials or caps on liquor licenses. At an alcohol summit Ms. Dude convened last spring, which brought together 100 people from the campus and community, one bar owner was overheard saying that he relies on underage women to keep his business afloat, says Janna D. Basler, head of Greek life for the university.

Five years ago, the state slashed funding for the Division of Alcohol and Tobacco Control, essentially turning over monitoring of bars and liquor stores to local law enforcement. The city police have had to rely on grants to conduct regular com-

pliance checks.

For the alcohol team, the lesson has been to be flexible and innovate. The campus police have added three more officers to patrol Greek Town, just off campus, on Thursday, Friday, and Saturday nights. The university has also ramped up bystander training to encourage students to look out for one another.

Alex Dyer, a fifth-year senior and past president of the Interfraternity Council, works in Ms. Dude’s office to develop alcohol-education programs that connect with fraternity pledges. Despite the persistent challenges, he says that in his time at Missouri, he’s seen a drop in out-of-control partying.

“When I first came, the perception of what’s acceptable was a lot different than what I’ve seen now,” he says. Part of that, he says, may be because at 23 he hangs out with different people. But off-campus parties are definitely smaller, he says. And these days tailgates max out at about 100 people, including parents.

Ms. Dude says she organized the alcohol summit last spring and another in the fall to remind the campus that everyone plays a part, and to help create new strategies to reduce dangerous drinking. Both the mayor and the chancellor attended. In January undergraduate deans began talking about adding more Friday-morning classes and eliminating syllabus week, when students get a light load to ease into the semester.

“A lot of people say if you push down in one area, it might pop up in another,” Ms. Dude says of high-risk drinking. “That might be true,” but it “sometimes becomes an excuse for doing nothing.” Her approach is relentless and evolving: “Why don’t we work on all areas?”

*Originally published on March 13, 2015*

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