



How Universities Can Proactively Address Student Binge Drinking

Description

While the decision to drink is a personal one, there are still steps higher education institutions can take to help encourage healthier drinking habits amongst their students.

In the US, the [National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism](#) defines binge drinking as “a pattern of drinking that brings blood alcohol concentration (BAC) levels to 0.08 g/dL.”

Colloquially, the term “[binge drinking](#)” is used to describe incidences where a person drinks a lot of alcohol in a short space of time to get drunk.

Binge drinking is particularly prevalent at university due to a range of factors that help to encourage the behavior.

[As part of a study into binge drinking](#) among university students in Belgium, some of these factors were identified as “independent living, reduced social control, increased social homogeneity, wide availability of social activities such as pre-gaming, drinking games, and other student recreational activities.”

While binge drinking tends to take place at most universities, the number of students participating in the activity does vary according to country and culture.

For example, [studies have shown that](#) alcohol consumption is higher among students in Europe and North America than in Asia and Africa.

[Binge drinking is a particular issue at UK universities](#) with 85% of students agreeing that “drinking and getting drunk is part of university culture.”

Vice interviewed international students studying in the UK and asked them what surprised them the most about the UK university experience, with many singling out the binge drinking culture.

Kenna from the US said, “I think the biggest shock for me had to be the drinking culture... I also come from a very conservative state in Alabama where some people refer to alcohol as ‘the devil’s fire water’, so to see a student bar on a college campus was so bizarre.”

Therefore, some activities centered on alcohol may [exclude international students](#) due to cultural differences.

In addition to this issue, there are several negative effects that binge drinking can have on student health and well-being.

[Short-term effects](#) of binge drinking may include nausea and vomiting, blackouts, injuries, risky sexual behavior, and alcohol poisoning.

Long-term effects of binge drinking may include liver cancer, neurological damage, depression, and anxiety.

With depression and anxiety being a key issue amongst young people already, helping students to manage their drinking habits can be a great way of improving their overall mental health.

Another consideration is that binge drinking can also cause a student’s academic results to suffer.

[Factors such as being late for class](#), missing classes, inability to concentrate in class, and inability to complete assignments are all associated with moderate to hazardous alcohol consumption.

Given this, how can your university proactively address student binge drinking and encourage healthy behaviors?

Encourage alternatives

Many students assume that everyone at university participates in binge drinking, and if they choose not to participate, they could be missing out on the social element of university.

However, there are many ways for students to have fun and socialize that involve little to no alcohol.

At the [University of Queensland](#) in Australia there are several clubs where drinking is not the focus, including the [Pokemon Fan club](#) and the [Photography Society](#).

It’s important that institutions encourage and promote clubs and societies such as these that don’t center around alcohol.

If a society does have a drinking element to its social events, universities must ensure that they spread a message of inclusivity; that nobody is forced to drink while in attendance.

In Scotland, the [University of Aberdeen](#) has been inventive with its encouragement of an [alcohol-free university experience](#).

They introduced [Keith House](#); an alcohol-free section of student accommodation at the university.

Decisions such as these all contribute towards a [bigger movement to normalize sobriety or minimal drinking](#) among university students.

Removing the stigma of this will allow future students to begin their university experience with the confidence to say no to heavy drinking.

Educate students

There are many who will still decide to drink while at university and educating these students on the risks of binge drinking can be a great way of keeping them safe as they do so.

For some students, this will be their first experience with heavy drinking, and so they might be uninformed about the risks or effects of alcohol.

Universities can help to spread this information in a clear and non-threatening way, such as via emails and posters on campus.

[The Yale College Dean's Office](#) found a unique method of educating their students. They offer free bartender training and certification to all undergraduate students, which helps to introduce students to alcohol in a controlled environment and teach them about units of measurement and general alcohol safety.

Support

If a student's drinking habit is having a negative effect on their life, it's crucial that they can access support to help them form a healthier relationship with alcohol.

There are many reasons why someone might take part in binge drinking while at university, including the pressure put upon them by other students or their society to do so.

Support services can help students recognize when alcohol is having a negative effect on them, identify the underlying cause of their drinking habits, and provide them with the strength and guidance to break away from destructive behaviors.

Social drinking is likely to remain a part of the university experience, but this doesn't mean that universities should turn a blind eye to hazardous drinking habits.

Any action that can have a negative effect on a student's university experience, one that might become a threat to their health or well-being, should be addressed.