ALCOHOL ON CAMPUS: WHO’S RESPONSIBLE FOR THE PARTY?

Deliberation Guide
Introduction

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Alcohol and America have a love/hate relationship. Americans love to consume alcohol which is why the temperance movement could not stop the population from drinking. Drinking is associated with many of societies’ traditions and norms. At football and baseball games many enjoy ice cold beers, on New Year's many celebrate the new year with champagne, a nice dinner with friends or coworkers involves nice wine and let’s not forget about the big 21st birthday. The Center for Disease Control and Prevention states that in the U.S. 51% of adults 18 and over are current relevant drinkers (http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/fastats/alcohol.htm). This fact helps show that alcohol consumption is the norm which is why the prohibition of alcohol was unsuccessful. Americans love to drink!

Alcohol is considered a gateway drug that has led to many fatal and horrid incidents in America. In 2012, 10,322 people were killed in alcohol-impaired driving crashes, accounting for nearly one-third (31%) of all traffic-related deaths in the United States. The annual cost of alcohol-related crashes totals more than $59 billion according to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention. In addition, according to the National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence, 36% of those under correctional supervision at the time were drinking at the time of their conviction offense. To add to that, federal research shows that for the 40% of convicted murderers being held in either jail or state prison, alcohol use was a factor in the homicide. Alcohol helps people to forget about misery and to have a good time but it brings far more harm than benefit. Sadly, some of these offenses come from college students.

College and drinking have a long history together. If you weren’t the one drinking, you knew someone who was. In today’s society, there are many expectations of college being a time of exploration and experimentation. In movies like American Pie, 21 and Over, and The House Bunny, drinking and partying have been glorified as the way to have fun in college. They show girls dancing on tables,
cups being flipped, keg stands, promiscuity and more. Everyone looks like they are having the time of their lives so what adolescent wouldn’t want that when they got older?

For many students, college is their first taste of freedom so it is the norm among students to go out and do what they’ve never done and push their boundaries. The National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism states that four out of five college students drink and about half of them consume through binge drinking, the act of drinking excessive amounts in a short period of time with the intention of becoming intoxicated. Jeff Hayes, Penn State professor of psychology and education, has collected data from 100 college campuses. His data showed that 44 percent of students engage in regular binge drinking and 33 percent of students report that they are unable to remember the night before after drinking. This irrational behavior is justified since blacking out is seen as a rite of passage and a common activity amongst college students. But why are we talking about drinking on campus as if it is something that has been ingrained in the college culture?

A major issue that is associated with college drinking is that most college undergrads are under the legal drinking age, 21, which puts them at risk of getting into legal trouble for underage drinking.

Underage drinking is an even greater problem and is more likely to lead to negative consequences. When alcohol enters the system some people become too loose and carefree. Specifically around college campuses, acts of violence such as fights and sexual assaults occur on a weekly basis. During the 2012-2013 year there were almost 30 sexual assaults reported at Penn State reported by onwardstate.com, not to mention the many that go unreported. Most of these statements include the word drunk in them because alcohol leads to bad decisions.

Penn State is no exception to this college party life expectation. In 2009, Penn State was ranked the number 1 party school in the U.S. Although PSU lost its spot at number 1, it still holds the rank of number 7. A survey conducted in 2013 by the student affairs Pulse program here at Penn State shows the following:
Although there has been an increase in the percentage of students who say they never tried a drink or currently don’t drink, the percentage of heavy drinkers has increased by 2.9% since 2011. Since this is a self-reported survey, it is hard to be sure that all participants were completely honest when reporting their drinking behavior, because they may not consider themselves to be heavy or moderate drinkers. Therefore, the percentages may be higher than depicted.

![Figure 1. Students' Self-Reported Drinking Behavior](image)

Penn State supposedly states that it is a dry campus, but between football weekends, State Patty’s Day and more, a counter argument can be made. Tailgates are a major part of Penn State tradition. Alumni come from all over, students flood to Beaver stadium and the majority of campus is glued to the TV screen anxiously watching the game. Tailgates start as early as 8am and consist of food, music and drinking. Drinking at the tailgates is a major reason as to why Alumni come back; it’s a way to reminisce about the old days. The university is aware of the drinking that takes place, knowing many students are engaging in underage drinking. The university overlooks it because to ban alcohol from tailgates could result in loss of funding and support. That’s not a risk the university is willing to take. Another event that goes against university policy yet is allowed is State Patty’s Day which started in 2007 as a result of students not being able to celebrate Saint Patrick's Day in State College. Students spend the day binge drinking and flooding the
streets hopping from bar to bar. There is an alert at least every weekend at Penn State informing students of the incidents and accidents though plenty others do not get reported out of fear or failure to remember. At this deliberation, we should think of the following: Who is responsible for excessive college drinking and what kind of help is needed for this issue.
Approach One

**Stricter Policies and Enforcement**

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Every student who comes to the Penn State campus officially agrees to abide by the “Student Code of Conduct,” including the condemnation of using alcohol against the law or university policy, or to suffer the penalties for disregarding it. Beyond that, the vast majority of Penn State students reach the age of 18 before or shortly after beginning their freshman year, and are therefore considered adults in the eyes of the law. They are now eligible to vote, to serve in the military, and to fulfill a host of other responsibilities. At this point in their lives, these students have had countless opportunities to hear and understand the drinking laws of our nation, and during the process of application and acceptance to Penn State, they have numerous opportunities to become familiar with the drinking policies particular to Penn State.

In the introduction to Penn State’s alcohol policy located on the “Student Affairs” website, the university acknowledges, “Illegal alcohol use or alcohol abuse on or off the premises of the University negatively affects the University community and places students at personal and academic risk.” Furthermore, the university states that their responses and policies regarding such behavior are intended to provide three main things: “(a) therapeutic or medical support interventions for students, (b) community expectations for student conduct behaviors, and (c) an orderly and safe environment for community members” (Student Affairs). Although the university currently has policies and enforcement strategies in place, they are insufficient to substantially curb the excessive drinking problem at Penn State.

As there are basics to everything, when students first come to Penn State University, they must attend orientation, which includes information about alcohol consumption. Here, leaders inform the students of basic drinking laws, how to be
responsible about the amount of alcohol students consume, and the possible consequences students will face if they are caught violating rules.

Current Penn State policy, which students are exposed to on multiple occasions before and during their arrival to campus, states that students are not supposed to purchase, possess and consume alcohol under the age of 21, no drinks are supposed to be served during football games, and use of school funds for purchase of alcoholic beverages are prohibited. After turning 21, the legal age for drinking, some students are not cautious with drinking and cause a lot of trouble through violence, destruction of property, or sexual assault. Being 21 is not an excuse to drink excessively and not think ahead about the negative consequences that it will bring. Students must be responsible for themselves. There are also a set of rules for the students who are above 21: no excessive consumption of alcohol, no supplying for the minors--meaning that they should not provide alcoholic beverages to underclassmen who are not legal--and lastly, no driving after drinking (Student Affairs). On the official school website, it states several more policies, but they are contained in these major ones.

The consequences students will face when violating drinking rules are not as severe as they ought to be. If they are caught violating drinking policies, they must complete a program called BASICS, which stands for Brief Alcohol Screening and Intervention for College Students (University Health Services). This program specifically contains similar information given during the orientation. As you can see, even though the students listen to sessions about alcohol abuse and the consequences of it, they tend to ignore it and follow their desires. If they have already received the same information about alcohol safety, and it has not yet changed their behavior, why should we expect it to make a difference after they are caught?

The policies set for Penn State students are too gentle, and they are ineffective at lessening dangerous consumption of alcohol. We must come up with another harsher punishment that would effectively reduce the bad side effects of excessive and underage alcohol consumption. One option for increasing the punishment would be to add a baseline fine for all students caught possessing or consuming alcohol against university policy in any way, in addition to the $200 fee
incurred for needing to attend BASICS (University Health Services). Even if the fine was relatively small, starting at an additional $200 for first-time offenses and slowly increasing for subsequent violations, if strictly enforced, it could serve as a powerful deterrent for students who habitually violate drinking laws.

The issue of adding new policy naturally leads us to examine the enforcement of the policy Penn State already has. Although elements of these policies may sound strong and comprehensive on paper, an informal survey of the student body reveals both absent and patchy enforcement mixed with a subculture of tolerance for drinking. For many incoming freshman last fall, their New Student Orientation discussion about alcohol policies actually turned into a discussion of how not to get caught while drinking illegally. Likewise, many students will testify that their RAs don’t really care about enforcing alcohol policy, particularly if the negative effects of students' drinking habits are kept somewhat under control. So, although there are policies in place to punish underage and excessive drinking, these policies are not consistently enforced, even by students such as RAs and orientation leaders who officially represent the university.

Similarly, while Penn State maintains strict policies like a “dry campus,” or prohibition of alcohol in the residence halls and virtually every other area of campus, the university also sponsors and promotes campaigns that assume students are going to drink anyway, and therefore encourages them to do it as safely as possible. For example, “Healthy Penn State” has a campaign called “Take the Lead” that features advice from student leaders about making wise choices. One student’s advice poster, hung in residence halls that primarily house people under the age of twenty-one, says, “If you choose to drink, be smart about it. Eat beforehand, drink plenty of water, and stay with a group of friends you know will look out for you” (Healthy Penn State). Although this may be done in an attempt to recognize the reality of prevalent underage drinking on campus and seek to keep students as safe as possible, it also works directly contrary to changing this negative aspect of the campus culture.

By acknowledging students' illegal or unwise drinking habits, and encouraging these students, regardless of age, to simply manage their behavior, the university is lowering its stated expectations for students to act as responsible,
law-abiding adults. Furthermore, because of the policies that are currently in place, such compromises appear hypocritical. Finally, such campaigns are confusing and troubling to the minority of students who choose not to drink alcohol either underage or excessively, and only serve to weaken their resolve or increase their feelings of isolation, because not even the university authorities have confidence that they can stick to their responsible and law-abiding convictions.

Students who have just crossed the threshold to adulthood and are given this wealth of information about the policies and dangers associated with drinking can and should be expected to behave responsibly and comply with the law, including underage drinking laws, “dry campus” policies, and prohibitions of excessive drunkenness. Penn State should add additional punishments for underage and excessive alcohol consumption, increase enforcement of the policies in place, and no longer sponsor campaigns that reinforce the inevitability of the drinking culture at Penn State.
Approach Two

Create Proactive Rules and Regulations

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**Introduction**

Unfortunately, Penn State's current approach to student drinking is ineffective. Although Penn State claims to be staunchly anti-alcohol and to have a completely dry campus, over 76% of Penn State students admit to drinking regularly (Penn State Student Affairs, “Student Drinking Spring 2013”) and Penn State ranks seventh for party schools in the United States (CollegeAtlas.org, “Top Party Schools in the US for 2015, 2014, 2013 and 2012”). Furthermore, when students drink, they are usually drinking a lot. When asked about their peak alcohol consumption in the past three months, 22.8% of drinkers reported consuming enough alcohol to provide a Blood Alcohol Concentration (BAC) of over 0.250 - a level at which effects include “possible death” (Penn State Student Affairs, “Student Drinking Spring 2013”).

Much of Penn State’s current drinking prevention policy automatically assumes that students will drink and therefore attempts to prevent specific particularly unsafe drinking practices rather than drinking as a whole. At New Student Orientation, discussion centers on “how” to drink at Penn State rather than on the dangers of drinking or the alternatives to drinking. Penn State’s only real attempt to actually prevent students from drinking is the online SAFE program, which is not even a hard and fast requirement for students. No one challenges this assumption that college students will drink and Penn State’s institution-wide acceptance that students will party is damaging. Since statistics show that most students drink for social reasons or to fit in (Penny, Armstrong-Hallam, 9), can we use Penn State policy to foster an environment where social activities revolve around healthy alternatives to drinking?
Therefore, Approach Two argues that we need to acknowledge that a significant portion of students is open to abstaining from the consumption of alcohol. Penn State should proactively support this decision by creating policy that makes alcohol-free social activities viable alternatives to partying and by providing students with more information on developing a happy, non-drinking lifestyle.

![Figure 5. Blood Alcohol Content of Drinkers During Peak Drinking Experience](image)

**Fig. 1** Penn State students' self-reported peak drinking experience within the past three months

*(Penn State Student Affairs, “Student Drinking Spring 2013”)*

**What We Could Do**

The most significant way to prevent drinking is to provide students with socially acceptable alternatives to drinking. According to Peggy Eastman, a college student in NIAAA discussion group, a huge portion of college students believe that drinking is a part of the college experience and that college is a place where students should participate in partying (Eastman, "The Student Perspective On College Drinking"). Penn State has a responsibility to respond to this widespread belief by introducing other activities that students can enjoy without alcohol consumption.
For example, Penn State currently has three THON canning weekends to raise money for the Four Diamonds Fund. During this time, thousands of students give up partying on these weekends and leave campus to participate. Therefore, there are significantly fewer parties held on/off campus on canning weekends. Penn State should increase options for other activities such as THON and its canning weekends so that students can choose healthier, non-drinking options instead of partying. Currently, Late Night at the HUB on Friday nights and movie nights at the HUB are two of only a few available fun weekend events that do not involve alcohol. Although movie night can be successful in attracting attendees, many students are not aware of Late Night and it is sometimes viewed as a “lame” thing to do. Penn State should make students aware of the campus’s opportunities available for students to have fun with others without drinking now, increase the breadth and depth of these opportunities, and work to market those activities in such a way that they become more accepted by the masses. Some of these activities could be provided through residence halls and could take the form of floor dinners and games nights on weekends, when most partying occurs. It is important to provide students who may only be interested in partying because they feel pressured to participate in a social custom with a chance to do something social, enjoyable, and non-alcoholic on weekend nights. These events will form strong bonds and healthy habits among students, which will give them a better basis from which to proceed in the future as they are presented with opportunities to drink.

Another approach would be to cultivate partnerships with the State College community through activities such as open mikes and special events at State College venues like Webster's Bookstore Cafe or the State Theatre. At this time, there is a tension between State College residents and Penn State students because there are many Penn State students who ruin residents' properties while drunk. By having partnership with community, residents might change their thoughts on Penn State students in a positive way.

Penn State could also work to prevent alcohol consumption by educating its students better about the risks and consequences of drinking. The current online training program SAFE is inadequate (and not even a requirement for students). SAFE could be supplemented by mandatory educational seminars or a mandatory
freshman seminar class focused on adjusting to life at college, making smart choices, and the dangers of alcohol. By making this type of training mandatory, students would become more thoughtful about their choices and the weight of the decisions they make. This education and training may also be helpful in preventing the sexual assaults that have been occurring with a particularly high frequency recently and are often related to the abuse of alcohol. Another important aspect is the adjustment of current alcohol “awareness” programs like that of New Student Orientation, where the discussion focuses on how to drink at Penn State rather than on the idea that drinking is unhealthy and risky. There is a relatively large segment of Penn State’s student population that chooses not to drink or has no interest in partying beyond as a social event, but many Penn State “training” programs assume that every student will drink. It is important to restructure these programs to acknowledge and embrace the option of an alcohol-free Penn State experience.

Tradeoffs and Downsides

With alcohol prevention activities, Penn State will incur some opportunity costs. If Penn State these activities become too costly, the university will have to increase tuition or fees to support holding those activities frequently. These events also require staffing, thus the demands on RAs and other university staff will increase. With these expenses, Penn State has no guarantee or even reason to fully believe that those prevention and promotion activities definitely will work in the future because students currently have parties on weekends despite activities like Late Night at the HUB and THON weekends. If few students go to Late Night now, how can we expect many students to attend other activities and give up their opportunity to party over weekends? Additionally, activities like these could take time away from students and their main class work. If Penn State is successful in preventing students from drinking, then community liquor stores will lose customers and face economic hardships.
Approach Three

Changing the Alcohol Culture at Penn State

*Sam Victor, Kriss-Ann Gayle*

College life and alcohol are deeply connected ideas in American culture. The alcohol culture at Penn State has been front and center for a long time; it is well-known as a “party school.” Such a perception detracts from the mission of the university and often threatens the safety of students. A number of factors play important roles in the alcohol culture at Penn State, including peer pressure, binge-drinking, tailgating, and fraternities. How can we alter the culture at Penn State to eliminate or at least limit the negative effects of alcohol? Managing peer pressure, providing greater supervision at frat parties, and considering the role alumni play in reinforcing an alcohol culture must all be addressed by the university.

**Introduction:**

Alcohol has been a part of college life, particularly Penn State, for longer than most of us can remember. The alcohol problem is not going anywhere. In fact, the problem seems to get larger and more out of hand as time goes by. There are a number of factors that contribute to, and maintain, the alcohol culture here at Penn State. These reasons include peer pressure, binge drinking, the alumni setting a bad example, and fraternities and sororities.

Peer pressure and the need for social interaction directly correlates to increased drinking on college campuses. There have been numerous studies done on the relationship between alcohol consumption and peer influence. One study in particular, conducted by Brian Borsari and Kate B. Carey, used the social learning theory (SLT) as a way to test peer influence on alcohol use. The three components of the SLT include social reinforcement, modeling, and cognitive process. Social reinforcement is dependent on the setting in which it occurs. Modeling occurs through the observation of others and cognitive processes, specifically self-efficacy
and alcohol expectancies, determine overt behaviors. The quality of peer relationships is defined by support, stability, and intimacy. Borsari and Carey tested three pathways that affected the three components of the SLT on alcohol use. The first pathway they tested was to see how a lack or breakdown of quality peer relationships can promote drinking. They asked students to record their social interactions and use of alcohol several times a day. Their research showed that people alleviate stress by drinking alcohol and that solitary drinkers show higher alcohol-related expectancies and display lower resistance to drink. The second pathway tested was to see if excessive drinking can arise if alcohol use becomes an integral part of peer interaction. The test involved reevaluating students after following them throughout college. The results showed that the social environment does indeed have a tremendous impact in college drinking. Students who are regularly exposed to peers who value and reinforce alcohol use have a greater chance of drinking in college. The third pathway tested was to determine if students tend to abstain from drinking when surrounded by peers who reject alcohol consumption. The study showed that alcohol use in students was very low when their peers forgo drinking. Also, freshman in particular are much less likely to drink when surrounded with abstinent peers. All these studies show the impact of peers on college students in regards to alcohol use.
Some may point out that drinking isn’t necessarily the problem at colleges. The real problem is binge drinking: the consumption of an excessive amount of alcohol in a short time frame (typically a blood alcohol concentration level near 0.08 g/dL). The difference between social drinking and binge drinking is that the main intent of binge drinking is intoxication. Binge drinking at college campuses happens everywhere, especially at frat parties and during tailgating events. The National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism states that about four out of five college students drink alcohol and half of those students binge drink. Binge drinking can lead to many severe consequences such as death, injury, assault, sexual abuse, and academic problems. Penn State recently has been dealing with several sexual assault cases. The details of each case are still relatively unknown, but is it irrational to think they were at least somewhat caused by overconsumption of alcohol? Binge drinking typically occurs when there is no supervision. Thus, it makes sense that binge drinking at college campuses primarily occurs at frat parties. Binge drinking can be easily stopped yet at the same time hard to prevent.

The Alumnus are an important part of the Penn State legacy and have come to represent the school as a whole; however, alumni should be more considerate of the important role they play as leaders and role models of this institution. College students are at a very impressionable age, especially considering that they are not yet established in life and are now at a place where they have the freedom to decide what they want and how they should live their lives. Many alumni attend Penn State football games where is guaranteed that there will be tailgating. When students witness the alumnus tailgating, and drinking, this reestablishes the idea that drinking is cool. This connection can be supported by Alfred Bandura’s, an expert Psychologist on social behavior, discovery that people tend to display behaviors that are learned either intentionally or inadvertently, through the influence of example. A person is more likely to display these behaviors if the behavior was learned from someone he or she admired. Erick Erikson, another psychologist, also noted that people who are forming their identities, are particularly likely to be susceptible to be influenced by adults in their environment. If this is in fact the case, the alumni plays a part in shaping how college students act.
Fraternities and sororities also play a huge role in establishing the culture of alcohol at Penn State. And while fraternities are not the only root of the alcohol issue, they certainly play a big role. Drinking has just become part of fraternity life and their parties. In fact, according to a 2007 study, published in the "Psychology of Addictive Behavior", fraternity membership is a major predictor of alcohol and drug abuse. The same study also discovered that people who want to drink or use drugs are more likely to join fraternities. In this case, fraternities may reinforce substance abuse. Either way, because so many fraternities have access to alcohol, it is only logical that their parties will generally always have alcohol. Many students attend frat parties and that is where much of the drinking occurs. It should also be noted that even though there are strict rules at Penn State about not drinking and Penn State is supposed to be a “dry campus”, frats throw parties off campus that most likely include the consumption of alcohol. Even though these parties are not technically on campus, Penn State students attend these parties, consume alcohol, and make their way back to campus. The association between fraternities and alcohol consumption has been an increasing problem for some time now, especially with the increase in criminal behavior associated with college students drinking alcohol. Another study conducted in 2013 and published in the "Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice" found that alcohol commonly plays a role in crimes such as rape and fraternity members are more likely to be involved in these incidents. With so much proof there, is no denying that fraternities really do contribute to the problem of alcohol use in college.

Managing the Culture of Alcohol:

- Penn State should educated students on positive peer pressure because students listen to other students more than authority figures.
- Students should also be educated about not succumbing to peer pressure.
- Alumnus should stop tailgating. If the alumnus terminate tailgating, Penn State students would be positively influenced.
- Educate students on possible health risks of binge drinking with a required freshman lecture. Penn State would be able to catch the problem
before it begins and gets out of control. Also, many people engage in binge drinking without being properly aware of possible outcomes.

- Increase consequences for fraternities partying excessively. Obviously, not all frat parties will cease to exist but they would certainly decrease.
- Hold fraternities more accountable for what goes on at their parties. Again, this would not stop all parties but reduce them and therefore reduce the amount of alcohol that college students consume.

**Trade Offs:**

- Students would feel as if they are losing their freedom
- Alumni would also feel as if the University is taking away their right to drink and tailgate
- Will students be actively engaged in a seminar that preaches about not succumbing to peer pressure?
- Do fraternities also feel like their losing their freedom?
- Staff will have to spend time teaching those extra courses.
Party School Problems: Who is Responsible for Excessive Drinking among Students at Penn State?

Would you like to learn more from others in the State College community about the impact of excessive drinking in our community? Would you like your voice to be heard on this issue? Then come to our community deliberation, a structured conversation about this issue that we hope will foster understanding and promote integrative negotiation. The event will take place at “Commonplace” on 115 S. Fraser Street from 1 to 3 PM on February 28th. It is part of a series of similar deliberations hosted by the students of Penn State’s “Rhetoric and Civic Life” class. We hope to see you there!

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Bibliography:

Overview/ Introduction:


Approach One:

Approach Two:

Approach Three:


