

# Freshmen Drinking @ Beloit College

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## Abstract

This project examined freshman alcohol consumption at Beloit College. My hypothesis is that poor drinking habits are the result of a lack of awareness of appropriate drinking habits and the consequences of drinking. My research was primarily based on conversations with Beloit College administration and students and includes relevant literature research. Administration interviewees included Christine Gravelle-Beloit Alcohol & Drug Education, John Winkelman-Residential Life, Bill Flanagan-Dean of Students, and Bruce Heine-Head of Security. Currently many freshmen students binge drink and drink irresponsibly leading to an array of consequences that includes many health risks. With this project I determined to what extent freshman drinking presents itself as a problem on campus. My poster presents how to inform incoming freshmen about how to safely and responsibly consume alcohol.

## Introduction

Many freshman college students use drinking alcohol as a social outlet but fall prey to irresponsible drinking behavior. I hypothesized that poor drinking habits are the result of a lack of awareness of appropriate drinking habits and the consequences of irresponsible drinking. One main problem that contributes to unhealthy drinking habits is a lack of knowledge about the consequences of exceeding drinking capacity. Many college students, not solely freshmen, binge drink. Binge drinking is defined as men consuming five or more drinks at a time. For women, it is four or more drinks.

Many people do not know that alcohol is a drug and a depressant. Many of the risks and consequences of excess alcohol consumption have long term impacts on drinkers. Some of these consequences include cirrhosis, various cancers including ovarian and breast cancer in women, increased risk of coronary heart disease and stroke, oral cancers and esophageal cancers. Excess alcohol consumption can lead to high blood pressure, gastrointestinal complications, and destruction of brain cells. Alcohol consumption can even have a profound effect on academic performance. Short term effects include disorientation, short term memory loss, impaired vision, impaired sexual function, and slow circulation. Drinking frequently can lead to the development of an addiction.<sup>1</sup> *In the fall semester of 2006, there were eight reported alcohol poisonings.* It is critical that freshmen and students in general understand the consequences of drinking so that they engage in drinking practices on the basis of accurate information and make informed decisions.

## Method

There are many resources available that contain information about the impact of alcohol consumption. All of the consequences are greatly increased with binge drinking. Due to the nature of my project I found interviews with the college administration and conversations with freshmen to be useful. Administration interviewees included Christine Gravelle, John Winkelman, Bill Flanagan, and Bruce Heine. Information volunteered by six anonymous freshmen, three females and three males with one non-drinking male and female each, are described. I used peer reviewed research from the *Journal of Nutrition*, *PubMed Journal*, and the *National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA)*. I also used Beloit College's two year alcohol and drug questionnaire, the CORE Alcohol and Drug Survey.

## Results

After conducting student interviews I found that both of the males who drink were binge drinkers. Both of the female drinkers I interviewed reported that they were moderate/social drinkers. All four of the drinkers interviewed reported that they started drinking before college. None of the drinkers reported drinking during the week. The frequency that each individual drank ranged from once a week to twice a month. Both males reported only drinking once a week despite binge drinking. One male reported consuming 4-6 beers and between 5-8 shots while the other male reported drinking anywhere from 10-15 beers and consuming a couple of shots. When asked what constituted one drink the four drinkers responses included one martini, one shot, two shots, one beer, one mixed drink, one 12 oz. glass of beer, and one 1.5 oz. shot. One drink is defined as one 12 oz. beer, 10 oz. microbrew, 10 oz. wine cooler, 8 oz. malt liquor, 4 oz. wine, 1.25 oz. of 80-proof hard liquor, or 1 oz. of 100-proof liquor. The students reported consuming wine, vodka, rum, and beer. Out of the four drinkers only one reported an increase in alcohol consumption since the beginning of the 2006-2007 school year. One-third of the interviewees perceived drinking as a problem on campus. Four of the participants agreed that the school policies on alcohol were effective, one disagreed, and one was unsure of the policy's effectiveness. All of the participants also believed that the majority of students on campus consumed alcohol.

# So What About Drinking?

Discussions with Beloit College Administration

## Is Drinking a Problem?--Stance on Drinking--Trends, Patterns, Changes--Personal Message

**Christina Gravelle-** "Drinking is no different at Beloit than at any other college campus. However, I appreciate our policy because it promotes responsible drinking and is more willing to use intervention rather than preventive measures. I agree with Beloit's philosophy about responsible drinking. If done responsibly drinking is a good social outlet but it's important to have good friends look out for you. Drinkers should know their limits, understand that you can help yourself and friends, and know who to contact in case of emergency. Personal education is the biggest thing. There is now a trend developing with mixing prescription and date rape drugs."

**John Winkelman-** "Yes, it's a problem but freshmen have to learn that there is responsibility with the freedom of college. If drinking is done responsibly, it's fine. However, you don't have to get drunk to have fun. Nowadays more students are drinking shots and hard liquor. More students are also beginning to rely on alcohol for fun. Be careful with alcohol, experiment cautiously, know what you're doing and have responsible friends."

**Bruce Heine-** "Sure, drinking is a problem just like everywhere else. Abstention is the best way to go, but if you're going to drink, take it easy. See how it affects you and keep in mind the rights and privileges of others. Most students are curious about alcohol. If you are going to drink go slow and easy. Alcohol is a drug and causes adverse reactions in small amounts with some people. Find out your tolerance. Drink with trusted friends, drink slow and easy, and don't mix alcohol with prescription or non-prescription drugs. Over the years alcohol awareness had increased. Student concern has led to more reportings when alcohol is involved."

**Bill Flanagan-** "Drinking is a problem on every college campus. Drinking is seen as a rite of passage among freshmen. The use of alcohol when a person is 21 can be appropriate and is legal. It provides a social context for people to get together. There are no objections to responsible drinking. Lately I have seen a change in when kids start drinking. Many freshmen are now starting to begin drinking in middle or high school. Students lack an awareness about how alcohol removes inhibitions. If you don't think ahead about the consequences or outcomes of drinking, then you're not drinking responsibly."

## Other Results

In 2005 40.2% of students thought that having five or more drinks of alcohol in one sitting was a great risk. Thirty-six percent of students said alcohol makes it easier to deal with stress. Fifty eight point four percent said that alcohol facilitates a connection with peers and 62.3% said that alcohol gives people something to talk about. Thirty percent of surveyed students had missed a class in 2005 because of alcohol. Twenty- eight percent reported memory loss, 60% had hangovers, and 49% had been nauseated or vomited after using alcohol. Seventy-five percent of the students surveyed had drunk alcohol within 30 days of the time the study was taken. Twenty-six point six percent reported having some kind of serious problem due to drinking. Forty-two percent of students reported binge drinking within two weeks of the survey. This is based on a 2005 study surveyed 840 students from all classes at Beloit College.<sup>3</sup>

## Discussion

Based on the interviews and data provided, it is clear that if freshmen drink alcohol, they should do so in moderation. Students should find out how their bodies process alcohol and be familiar with BAC, Blood Alcohol Concentration. A BAC of .05% is reached after 2 drinks for a man and 1 for a woman weighing 150 pounds. Once an individual has a BAC of .05%, the positive effects of alcohol are cancelled by the negative effects. Students should plan and set a limit on how much they want to drink. Students should eat before and while drinking to slow the absorption of alcohol into the bloodstream. Drinks should be consumed in moderation with time between refills. *It is important to pace drinking because the liver can only get rid of one standard drink every one and a half hours.*<sup>2</sup> Drinking games should be avoided and individuals should keep track of how much they drink. It is also wise to drink with responsible friends because it is not easy to make good decisions with impaired judgment.



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## Sources for people to obtain information

PubMed Central- <http://pubmedcentral.nih.gov/articlerender.fcgi?tool=pmcentrez&artid=1446766>

Journal of Nutrition- <http://jn.nutrition.org/cgi/content/full/133/1/287s?maxtoshow=HITS=10&hits=10&RESULTFORMAT=&fulltext=alcohol&andonexactfulltext=and&searchid=1&FIRSTINDEX=0&sortspec=relevance&resourcetype=HW CIT>

## References

- <http://pubs.niaaa.gov/publications/ar284/205-212.htm>
- "Drinking Facts-About Alcohol" ©2000 ETR Associates, Jason Kilmer
- 2005 Core Alcohol and Drug Survey-Beloit College