

The Musings of a Conduct Officer



BASICS

Student Advocacy & the Message

Better Alcohol EDU Needed

By smo17 On February 19, 2015 · Add Comment

BASICS is great! But the problem with Basics is that it is a reactive educational sanction for students who violate the alcohol policy at Penn State.

As a conduct officer I get the message that it is not the job of the conduct officer to go over standard definitions of a drink, how much alcohol your body can process an hour, BAC's, or even ways to reduce the risk of high-risk alcohol consumption.

And really, part of this makes sense. As a conduct officer, by the time a student is meeting with me, they have already committed the act of alcohol consumption, which is what ultimately brought them to meet with me. So I understand that my job in the conduct conversation is to talk about the policy that was violated, talk about recommended sanctions and provide an opportunity for a student to reflect upon the situation and explore some take-aways from the situation.

However, there is a strange dichotomy that exists at Penn State that I think needs to be addressed by every department; I also see this in Residence Life in my job as a coordinator.

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We know that students are going to drink and we cannot be naïve and act like or think that they aren't going to. So to me, I would like to have a frank conversation with students about alcohol consumption, however the message here is that our job is to say, "No, you cannot drink underage or on campus because it is either illegal or against policy so don't do it." I think ultimately this leads to the reactive process of alcohol conversations on campus.

Before a student comes to Penn State, they are required to take SAFE and AWARE. SAFE is a confidential online alcohol education module students are required to take and AWARE is a confidential sexual assault online module. Though I have never taken SAFE, more education is needed for students when they arrive on campus around alcohol education.

Penn State has a pretty large culture for alcohol consumption, and more importantly especially around high-risk drinking behaviors. Just from watching students over the course of the weekend and meeting with students to discuss their situations, our students do not know how to drink responsibly.

Simple things can really go along way to help educate our students such as:

Alcohol does not make a student warmer. Instead, alcohol causes all the blood to rise to the surface of your skin. This is why people turn red or flush when they drink. With the blood rising to the surface of their skin their vital organs are left unprotected thus becoming more susceptible to hypothermia and frostbite. It takes 1 hour for your body to process a standard drink. Overloading your body with alcohol can cause the body to shut down (passout) or cause a blackout.

A blackout is when your short-term memory doesn't transcribe information to your long term memory. Sometimes students will regain that memory after a blackout period; sometimes that memory is gone forever. The scary thing about a blackout is that your body is still completely functioning; you are just not cognizant of what you are doing (almost like a zombie). It can take up to an entire month for your brain to recover from a blackout period. Blackouts can cause the same side effects of

a concussion (cannot concentrate, remember things, read, etc). The only thing you can do to get alcohol out of your system is time. Cold showers, drinking more alcohol, drinking coffee/water does not help you sober up.

If you are going out, do not leave your drink unattended and only drink from containers you physically open and have in your possession. Drinking from glasses you left unattended, you got from open-source containers such as trash can punch or hunch punch or even from something someone poured for you could be extremely dangerous because you do not know what is in there.

You do not know how much alcohol is in the drink...it could be a lot stronger than you imagine or,

Someone could have slipped a drug in there that could cause negative consequences. Date rape drugs are colorless, odorless and tasteless.

It takes seconds for alcohol to reach your brain the moment it enters into your system. The reason why alcohol is dangerous is because alcohol and marijuana attack the brain cells in the frontal lobe of the brain that has to do with memory and critical thinking. Having a full stomach, especially greasy foods, help slow down the process of alcohol entering your system because the alcohol has a harder time breaking down greasy food particles. Drinking on an empty stomach can be extremely dangerous.

Binge Drinking is 3 to 4 drinks in 1 sitting for a female and 5-6 drinks in one sitting for men. 85% of all deaths on campus from alcohol consumption comes from situations where binge drinking was involved. Most students think binge drinking is 10-15 drinks. Playing 1 game of beer pong could easily be binge drinking and result in negative consequences.

Use the buddy system. If you go to a party with friends, make sure you leave with friends and hold each other accountable.

Alcohol is bi-phasic. So when you consume alcohol, the first phase is the phase where you feel good and buzzed, but the longer alcohol is in your body the more sick you become (the second phase).

Though your body can only process one drink per hour, while you are consuming alcohol, the alcohol will stay in your body up to x hours based upon the number of standard units you drink from the time you stop drinking. So for instance, if you started drinking at 6:00pm and stopped at Midnight and you had 10 drinks, the

alcohol would not be out of your system until 10 hours after Midnight so 10am the next day. If you had somewhere to be at 8am, chances are you would be going there still intoxicated. If you have to get into a car, chances are you would still be driving impaired.

I think even just talking about these few pieces of alcohol education is important so that students are better informed and can make more educated and informed decisions about how and why alcohol is dangerous to consume.

With the alcohol education, I think more information about the consequences of alcohol consumption are also necessary.

For instance, an ambulance ride to the hospital is about \$500-\$1200. The hospital stay (where all they do is put you in a diaper and let you sleep) costs \$1200-\$2000. The underage citation if police are involved could cost \$500-\$1000. Lawyer/court fees could be another \$500-\$1000 and basics costs \$200. If you bank on the higher side of all of those costs you are looking at \$5400. That makes those drinks pretty expensive and definitely not worth it.

If you are placed on probation, you cannot study abroad during that semester and anything from probation or higher is reported out to your academic college and to employers/grad schools if they request it and a student gives approval.

If you are hosting a party and people leave that party intoxicated and do something such as get into a car and hit someone or anything else, as the host of the party you are ultimately responsible for either providing alcohol, or providing a place to consume alcohol which could have major consequences.

If you are hosting a party at your fraternity house, apartment, etc and someone leaves and gets into a car accident and kills someone, you could also be held responsible.

Providing or furnishing alcohol to minors is also a really bad idea.

In some places, these are considered felonies. If you have a felony on your record, you cannot:

- Vote
- Carry a weapon

Take the Bar Exam

Take the LSAT

Take the MCAT

Teach at a school

Hold government positions, etc

Could you imagine after 4 years of college and paying the expensive price tag for an education, if your degree was worthless because you made a poor decision in college?

And promoting the safety and security protocols and tips when it comes to alcohol consumption can also be important and part of the educational program:

Responsible Action Protocol

A protocol on campus that states even if you have been drinking or violated campus policy but you get help for a friend who needs help and you call police, the situation would not show up on your conduct record. This does not mean that you may not have consequences such as Basics, etc but you would not have to pay for it and it wouldn't show up on your record because you did the right thing.

Bystander intervention à Getting people help if they need it and taking a responsible stand in the community by making sure people are helped if they need it is important.

865.WALK (9255). If you call this number, police will provide an escort to walk you across campus. It would be either an officer or an auxiliary officer.

Avenues to report. Promoting the avenues to report crimes, sexual assaults, or any other thing that might need to be reported.

Consent means sober consent. You cannot have sex with someone who is not capable of giving consent in the moment when the sexual act occurred.

Using the buddy system, staying with friends, walking home together, etc.

Overall, I think that a better approach to alcohol education on campus should be more proactive, with the goal to avoid the number of referrals, sexual assaults, injuries and alcohol transports to the hospital. Through educating students on the affects that alcohol has on the body, the consequence that can be associated with alcohol

consumption and tips and polices on staying safe will make for a better and more effective message than the age old antiquated message of, “You cannot drink because it is illegal/against policy...so don’t do it.”

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