

Student Activities JOURNAL



ALCOHOL AND ITS EFFECTS on a College Education TODAY

By Elaine Pasqua

When looking back most people say that their college years were some of the best in their lives. Students love to have a good time and party, but some drink excessively, placing their lives and futures in jeopardy. Alcohol is the high-risk behavior that interferes most with a successful college education today and it has caused the most harm and suffering to humans than any other substance. We need to respect it!

With over 14 years of speaking at campuses nationwide, I've met thousands of students and have heard all the stories. Many are on the 5 to 6 year plan because they partied, mostly in their freshman year. One student drank every night and achieved a GPA of .3 by the end of her first semester! She lost her full scholarship, had to move home to commute to a campus that she did not like, and pay her own tuition. When we met, she should have been a junior but she was still in her freshman year. She was juggling work and going to class. Sometimes we don't realize that our choice to abuse alcohol can have such an impact on our future plans and cost us a lot of money.

When abused, alcohol can be detrimental, but we can drink responsibly and keep each other safe. Looking at alcohol use on college campuses today, the proportion of students who binge drink has remained constant, but they are drinking more frequently, and consuming larger quantities when they do. Previously known as binge drinking, it is now referred to as high-risk drinking.

So what quantities are considered high-risk? If a male consumes 5 drinks and a female consumes 4 drinks within a two hour period of time that will raise blood alcohol to .08 which is when a person is considered legally drunk.

It actually takes longer for females to break down or metabolize alcohol. Alcohol is stored in the body fat and women have a higher proportion of fat on their bodies. Females also have less of the enzyme that breaks down alcohol. If a girl tries to consume the same quantity of alcohol as a guy, she will be much more wasted than him.

What quantities of alcohol constitute one drink; twelve ounces of beer, five ounces of wine and one and a half ounce of hard liquor. People are drinking from larger containers and are consuming more than they realize. Wine glasses are wider than they use to be and hold more. The red Solo cup is the favorite at parties. If you fill it up with beer you now have 16 ounces so you are consuming more than one drink.

The body can only clear or break down one drink per hour. For a female it is a little longer. When you consume more than that, the brain is forced to absorb the

excess alcohol and you systematically shut down one area of the brain after another. The area of the brain that controls our higher rational thinking shuts down first. That's why so many students do things that they would not normally do, or wake up the next day with regrets!

The area that shuts down next regulates speech and muscle coordination. It is important that you learn to look out for one another. Many students have sustained injuries or lost their lives because their friends thought that they were okay to make it back to their rooms by themselves. Many have fallen down flights of stairs, off of balconies, out windows, and off of roofs. Some sustain head injuries, broken bones, and sutures. We see accidental drowning in rivers and ponds. I learned of a girl who wandered off from her friends, passed out, fell face down in a puddle and drowned! Some people are put to bed by their friends, get up and get into harms way. Never leave a wasted friend alone.

If someone is passed out, cold, clammy, their skin is pale or a bluish color, they are experiencing alcohol poisoning. The brain stem, which is the area that regulates involuntary reflexes such as heart rate and breathing, is now shutting down. That person is very close to death. They need to be taken to the hospital. Many students have lost their lives because their friends thought that they could sleep it off.

Alcohol is connected to so many negative outcomes on campuses today. Let's look at some of the annual stats:

- 41% of all academic difficulties and 28% of all college drop outs are due to alcohol abuse
- 1,825 students die annually from alcohol related accidents
- 300 die from alcohol poisoning
- 595,000 students sustain alcohol related injuries
- 696,000 students are physically assaulted by another who is under the influence
- 400,000 engage in unprotected sex
- 100,000 don't remember if they consented
- 97,000 students are sexually assaulted each year, alcohol is involved in 90% of the cases.

The blood alcohol level of .05 is called the Bi-Phasic stage. Under .05 BAC people are loose, relaxed and somewhat under control. Once a person crosses over the .05 BAC we see the personality changes, like the drama for the ladies. They start crying over the craziest things! We also see the violence where the fights break out and people are injured.

Underage drinking is harmful to developing brains. The brain does not fully develop until you are 25. In the late teens and early 20s, crucial development such as the shaping of the adult brain occurs. Excess neural connections are pruned back and more efficient and permanent pathways develop, particularly in the area of decision-making and impulse control.

For those under the age of 25, brain scans show that heavy drinking, defined as 20 or more drinks per month, can damage the frontal cortex, the white matter, and the hippocampus of the brain. This leads to decrease cognitive function, executive function, memory, attention, and spatial skills. Those who have a history of high risk drinking retrieve 10 % less information compared to those who didn't. Cognitive development is actually arrested by larger quantities of alcohol.

So how can one drink safely and responsibly? The rule of thumb, don't consume more than one drink per hour. You can catch a light buzz but not get wasted by over loading the body and brain with too much alcohol.

Also drink a non alcoholic beverage in between each drink. The area of the brain that controls your bodily fluids also shuts down. You urinate out more fluid than you take in and literally dehydrate the brain. This causes the hangover and headache the next day. Drinking a non alcoholic beverage in between drinks gives the liver a chance to break down the alcohol and rehydrates the body to prevent a hangover. You'll feel better the next day!

Why do students drink excessively? The need to loosen up in a social setting is the number one reason for abusing alcohol. Learn to feel comfortable with yourself. Having confidence and feeling good about who you are will enable you to have a good time without needing alcohol as a social lubricant. Studies show those under the age of 21 who use alcohol to loosen up in a social setting tend to carry that pattern with them through their adult life. Many addictive patterns with alcohol begin in college.

Respect alcohol, have fun, but most importantly be safe and protect your friends who could be in harms' way.



As a nationally recognized speaker, Elaine Pasqua has combined her life experience, enthusiasm, and passion to positively influence thousands of college students across the United States. Her eye-opening and interactive programs address the negative effects of high-risk behaviors, and their impact on long-term goals and life ambitions. She is a contributing columnist to Campus Activities Magazine, and co-wrote, directed and produced a date rape drug video which has been viewed a half a million times on YouTube. Elaine has been a keynote speaker for the NCAA, NBA, NFL and featured in USA Today, Time Warner Cable TV, and Knight Ridder News Service.