Addressing College **Drinking** and **Drug Use**

A Primer for Trustees, Administrators, and Alumni

AMERICAN COUNCIL OF TRUSTEES AND ALUMNI
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by

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"Please take a moment to reflect on the bright futures that end in alcohol or drug-related illness, injury, or deaths at colleges and universities. Over the last decade, they have numbered in the thousands. College drinking and drug abuse are issues of extreme urgency. And you, as a trustee, have the power—and the fiduciary duty—to make the campus safer. The transition from high school to college is a time of vulnerability for many students. For most, it is their first time away from home for an extended period, and they are thrust into an environment where everyday interactions are almost entirely with their peers. Throw alcohol and drugs into the mix and you can have a lethal combination."

—American Council of Trustees and Alumni, 2012

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In February 2012, the American Council of Trustees and Alumni (ACTA) released a short guide to help trustees and administrators understand the growing problem of substance use on campus. Unfortunately, the statistics remain grim. While the newest statistics might not be surprising, the prevalence of drug and alcohol abuse on campus has a tragic human face.

This guide seeks to provide the latest data on substance use among college students, reframe prevention efforts around the university's academic mission, and help trustees and university leadership change their campus cultures through evidence-based practices. Lastly, to help trustees and administrators see these recommendations at work, this guide offers examples of successful programs that have implemented effective strategies on campus.

Although the specific effects of alcohol, cannabis, and prescription medication misuse on student health and success differ, they share in common the reality that they all can have a harmful impact on academic achievement and impair mental and/or physical well-being.

About one-third of full-time undergraduate college students in the United States drink excessively, which includes heavy drinking and binge drinking (as defined by four or more drinks on a single occasion for females and five or more for males).[1] Annually, more than 1,500 students die from alcohol-related consequences, and

hundreds of thousands experience alcohol poisoning and/or non-fatal injuries.[2] Harm to others in the form of assaults,[3] impaired driving,[4] and damage to community property[5] are highly prevalent as well.

Increasing cannabis use by college students is a warning bell calling campus leaders to address substance use. The growing body of evidence on cannabis use reveals that cannabis can have significant negative effects on the cognitive development and health of young adults. And the 21st century is bringing an array of new challenges, including higher levels of THC in cannabis, synthetic cannabinoids, and new modes of drug administration including edible products and vaping. The impression that cannabis is a relatively harmless substance has proven faulty and dangerous—cannabis-impaired driving, cannabis-associated mental health problems, decreases in academic engagement, and links to opioid use all show the very real risks of failing to address cannabis use.

Prescription drug misuse, which has been called the fastest-growing drug problem in the United States, is also cause for concern, with many college students using drugs like Adderall® and Ritalin® without a prescription purportedly to improve their academic performance. Unfortunately, this form of drug use is typically a symptom of broader substance use problems and academic difficulties.[6]

Only 60% of college students will graduate within six years.[7] Leaders in higher education increasingly recognize the contribution of substance use issues to academic disengagement and dropout rates. Not only have multiple studies demonstrated that substance use during college can compromise health and safety,[8] there is ample evidence that it strongly correlates with diminished cognitive ability,[9] critical thinking,[10] academic performance,[11] and with limited likelihood of employment post-college.[12]

To address these problems, the standard approach that colleges take is to educate students about risks. However, educating students about the risks of excessive drinking does not change their behavior.[13] The National Institutes of Health CollegeAIM framework recommends both environmental and individual-level interventions to address substance use.[14] Federal agencies also endorse multi-level, multi-component approaches. Environmental interventions (e.g., enforcement of underage drinking laws,[15] social host laws,[16] responsible beverage service,[17] and use of campus and local media to promote awareness and enforcement of these laws[18])

are effective in reducing college student drinking. Campus policy enforcement is also essential, but the sanctions for violating policies must be sensible and geared toward getting high-risk students the help they need to change their behavior. At the individual level, widespread screening to identify students at high risk for developing problematic substance use patterns and clinical interventions for unhealthy alcohol use and substance use are feasible and effective.[19] Unfortunately, colleges seldom use this set of comprehensive strategies.[20]

Policies that work to strengthen the academic mission, re-norm the campus culture, improve screening, deploy evidence-based clinical interventions, and provide alternatives to consumption are all important components of a comprehensive strategy that campuses will need to reverse the dangerous trajectories of substance abuse. Many concerned university leaders and personnel across the country have led efforts to discern which prevention policies actually work. Institutions must craft and enact policies that address their particular student body and culture, as well as the nature and prevalence of substance abuse on the particular campus. To be successful, cost-effective approaches require coordination at various university levels, full support from the president and trustees, and collaboration with the community, other universities, and state government. Campus leaders must also publicly communicate to students what the policies actually are and why they have been chosen, consistently enforce these policies, and work to shape students' perceptions in a positive and data-driven manner.

Addressing College **Drinking** and **Drug Use**

TRUSTEES AND ADMINISTRATORS: *Concern and Duty*

The problem calls out for trustees and administrators to be proactive, to anticipate and avoid the subtle yet insidious impact on student achievement, as well as more serious substance use-related tragedies that can—and do—follow.

1. **College leadership is responsible for promoting a healthy and safe environment.**

The continuing reports of alcohol-related sexual assaults, injuries, and deaths are compelling reasons for trustees and administrators to strengthen and re-evaluate their current strategies for addressing excessive drinking and substance use. Trustees and administrators have a legal and ethical obligation to address substance use as a campus safety issue. Preventing the excessive use of alcohol and drugs will help to reduce risky behaviors that students engage in when intoxicated, behaviors that threaten their well-being as well as the well-being of those around them and also represent exposure to legal liability for the institution.

2. **College leadership is responsible for breaking down barriers to student success.**

Although the ways in which substance use might erode a student's path to academic achievement are subtler than overt consequences such as alcohol poisoning, these effects can derail college success. They warrant very serious attention. Academic performance issues have multiple roots, which often overlap, but for some students, drug use is a major or even primary contributory factor. The observation that there are no emotional or adjustment disorders that will not be exacerbated by substance abuse tends to be frighteningly true. Excessive drinking and cannabis use can significantly diminish students' commitment to their academic work and have adverse effects on

their ability to succeed both personally and professionally. Thus, addressing these issues evokes the central purpose and reason for the existence of an institution of higher education. Concerned university leaders must not wait until students fail classes. Identifying students who are at risk for academic failure and intervening in sensible and effective ways will help to put students back on track, increase their chances of having successful college experiences before they drop classes, and avoid problematic patterns that might well haunt them long after their college years.

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Being proactive is essential because it is rare for students to seek help on their own. Young adults have an inherent sense of invincibility. Research shows that a considerable number of students with demonstrated need believe their behavioral health problems will resolve on their own.[21] Furthermore, only 2.4% of full-time college students with an alcohol use disorder believed that there was a need for treatment.[22] When coupled with the idea that it is normal for students to engage in excessive drinking or other forms of substance use in college as a "rite of passage," this perception of invulnerability prevents students from accessing help on their own.[23] Therefore, schools must connect the dots for students who are academically struggling—especially when one of the reasons they might not be succeeding is substance use.

3. Top-level leadership is essential.

College leaders might overlook or hesitate to tackle substance use-related problems for a number of reasons—including feeling under-resourced or a lack of familiarity with best practices. Reluctance to interfere in the personal lives of students and perceived negative reactions from students are particularly common but ill-informed reasons, based on misleading assumptions about student attitudes. Although 55% of college and university administrators identify opposition from students as a barrier to the enforcement of substance use policies,[24] students' *actual support* for alcohol

and drug prevention efforts has been found to be higher than their *perception* of their peers' level of approval for such policies.[25]

IMPACT OF EXCESSIVE DRINKING AND DRUG USE ON STUDENT SUCCESS

Addressing substance use is essential to creating an environment that eliminates barriers to success and helps each individual student maximize his or her potential. There are two major ways in which substance use has an impact on educational performance.

First, substance use can have an acute and sometimes long-term impact on a person's ability to think clearly. Certainly college classes are inherently challenging and require students to engage both in class and outside of class when reviewing material, completing assignments, and working with others on projects. The cognitive effects of substance use include impeded learning and memory, which make completing quality assignments much more difficult.[26] Students who use cannabis might struggle to absorb information during their classes and to recall what they learned upon leaving the lecture hall. Users who quit after periods of daily use continue to experience cognitive deficits for periods up to almost a month after ceasing.[27] Researchers found that deficits in verbal learning took two weeks to return to pre-cannabis use levels, deficits in verbal working memory took three weeks, and attention deficits were still present at three weeks.[28] And these studies address only lower potency cannabis, while many Americans are using cannabis with much higher potency.[29]

Second, substance use, whether it be alcohol, cannabis, or some other drug, usually produces an immediate, albeit short-lived, pleasurable sensation. The degree to which a person experiences these immediate rewards places the person at risk for more regular or compulsive use. That process can preempt the brain's reward system.[30] It follows that when students use any substance, including cannabis, they run the risk of having other activities and relationships that were once important to them lose their value. Focusing on academic pursuits—which might be challenging but carry longer-term rewards—becomes more difficult if a person is engaging in substance use. The sense of accomplishment that comes from academic success becomes much less meaningful. After a while, as drug use becomes more valued, students re-shuffle their priorities. They might be less concerned about making the grade; completing

assignments and going to classes become less important. They are likely to commit less time to studying or professional pursuits, and in general might fail to take advantage of all that college has to offer.[31] Ultimately, their grades and their chances of graduating can decline.

This grim scenario is based on research findings and the clinical accounts of health professionals who provide care for young adults.[32] Students at large research universities who reported heavy episodic drinking had lower levels of interaction with faculty members.[33] This loss of communication can severely diminish the quality of education that students receive. Those who do engage with faculty members not surprisingly report much more fulfilling academic experiences. Alcohol consumption has been found to be a predictor of GPA. In one study of more than 40,000 students at 28 institutions, students who drank heavily four or more times during a two-week period were 10 to 16 percentage points less likely to have an "A" average than those who did not drink at all.[34] A 2011 study of 13,900 freshmen at 167 universities found that, after time spent studying, the amount of time students spent drinking was the strongest predictor of their GPA, even exceeding time spent in the classroom.[35]

A Yale University study of 1,100 students at two Connecticut universities found that the majority of students used alcohol and cannabis together, leading to yet graver consequences: "Students who drank minimal alcohol and used minimal amounts of cannabis had an average GPA of 3.10, while those who drank a [moderate to heavy] amount of alcohol earned an average GPA of 3.03. The most dramatic change occurred in students who used both alcohol and cannabis—their GPAs averaged 2.66."[36]

CURRENT CHALLENGES

1. Alcohol

College students are more likely to participate in excessive drinking and experience alcohol intoxication than their non-college peers. National data from the Monitoring the Future 2017 Survey of College Students shows that 32.9% of college students reported excessive drinking during the past two weeks, and 35.0% reported having been drunk during the past month (compared with 28.1% and 29.9% among their non-college peers, respectively).[37]

Young adults overall are at risk for high-intensity drinking, defined as drinking 10 or more drinks on one occasion. Yet the occurrence of high-intensity drinking dramatically declines after the age of 22, signaling the close correlation between college attendance and likelihood of drinking high quantities of alcohol.[38] Across the 13 years from 2005 to 2017, about 12% of college students reported high-intensity drinking.[39] High-intensity drinking is about three times higher among college males (21%), than among college females (7%).[40]

DATA

35.0% of college students reported having been drunk during the past month (compared with **29.9%** of their non-college peers).[37]

Between 2014 and 2017, past year cannabis use among college students increased by **11%** (**34.4%** compared with **38.3%**).[55]

Nonmedical use of prescription stimulants like Adderall® and Ritalin® **nearly doubled** between 2008 and 2013.[72]

69.4% of students who misused prescription stimulants were excessive drinkers, and **67.8%** used cannabis during the past month.[74]

In a study of 40,000 students at 28 schools, students who drank heavily four or more times during a two-week period were **10 to 16 percentage points** less likely to have an "A" average than those who did not drink at all.[34]

Among college students who drank during the past year, 32.0% did something they later regretted, 26.9% forgot where they were or what they did, 20.4% had unprotected sex, and 12.1% injured themselves.[41] In 2014, counting both students and the wider population overall, 4,105 adults of college age (18–24) died from alcohol-related injuries, and 2,614 of them perished in alcohol-related traffic accidents. Alcohol-related overdose deaths among this group rose from 207 young adults in 1998 to 891 young adults in 2014, an increase of 254% per 100,000 people.[42]

Reports of alcohol-related deaths on campus have made headlines. The death of 19-year-old Pennsylvania State University student Timothy Piazza after a hazing

ritual in which he was forced to consume 18 drinks in under two hours—and lay dying for 12 hours, his fraternity brothers unwilling to take him to the hospital for fear of punishment—drew considerable national attention both to dangerous hazing practices and to alcohol abuse on college campuses. Three of the fraternity members involved pled guilty to charges related to hazing and were sentenced to up to six to nine months in jail.[43]

2. Alcohol and Sexual Assault

It is predictable that alcohol abuse would be closely linked to sexual assault. Although excessive drinking does not cause unwanted sexual encounters, studies have found that almost half of sexual assaults on college campuses include a perpetrator or victim who has been drinking. Sexual assaults are more likely to occur in settings where alcohol is being consumed, including parties and bars.[44] The complex ways in which alcohol is a contributing factor to sexual assault has been the focus of much research.[45] When Grinnell College began to consider how to prevent sexual assault on campus, Grinnell President Raynard Kington shared in an essay for *Inside Higher Ed* that "specialists in the prevention of sexual assault on college campuses were very blunt in their direction to us: They told us that we would never address the problem unless we also addressed the issue of excessive drinking."[46]

3. Alcohol and the Greek System

The risky behaviors common on college campuses are especially apparent within Greek organizations. Frequent alcohol consumption is often a defining characteristic of Greek life, playing a major part in social rituals and house parties. In December 2017, *TIME* released an article covering a series of fraternity hazing deaths which occurred during that year. Each one of the deaths was alcohol-related.[47] Fraternity and sorority participants drink much more heavily than other students. The Harvard School of Public Health's College Alcohol Study found that "almost three in four students (75%) living in a fraternity or sorority house binge drink."[48] According to leading drug abuse prevention expert Dr. Robert DuPont, "High on the list of contributing factors" to whether a person abuses alcohol and drugs is "availability and acceptability of drugs of abuse." Dr. DuPont explains in his book *Chemical Slavery* that those who are surrounded by friends who use alcohol and drugs addictively are more vulnerable to developing addiction themselves, a relationship that helps to explain the extremely high levels of excessive drinking that occur within Greek organizations.[49] In addition to increased vulnerability to addiction, fraternity and

sorority residents report experiencing numerous negative consequences from other members' drinking, including "serious argument, assault, property damage . . . interrupted study or sleep, an unwanted sexual advance, or sexual assault."[50]

University presidents increasingly articulate the urgency of reforming the Greek system to address dangerous behaviors like alcohol abuse that have played a part in so many campus tragedies. The presidents of three institutions where fraternity members died in 2017 in alcohol-related incidents—Pennsylvania State University (PSU), Louisiana State University (LSU), and Florida State University (FSU)—have joined together to address these problems. Presidents Eric Barron, Maxwell Gruver, and John Thrasher have made a commitment to reforms that will not disappear after the public outrage surrounding a student's death subsides. They have taken temporary measures such as suspending Greek activities, creating new rules for checking IDs at parties, and implementing alcohol bans. But they are also working toward long-lasting change by collaborating to create a "national scorecard" that will keep fraternities and sororities accountable by making information on their performance and their misconduct publicly available. PSU, LSU, and FSU are already issuing scorecards for the Greek chapters on their campuses to help parents and students "make informed decisions about which chapters to join" and to help administrators identify trends among particular fraternities and sororities.[51] These scorecards can benchmark Greek organizations' frequency of alcohol and cannabis violations, violations of campus safety rules, and even their academic performance. Greek membership organizations are uniquely positioned to leverage their focus on student leadership and service activities to become role models for other students by de-emphasizing the need to include alcohol and other substances as part of social activities in college.[52]

4. Cannabis

The relaxation of cannabis laws nationwide is associated with decreases in perceptions of risk and a doubling of the prevalence of use among 18 to 25 year olds.[53] In 2017, 38.3% of college students reported using cannabis in the past year,[54] and there have been increases in use and daily use during the last decade. Between 2014 and 2017, past year cannabis use among college students increased by 11% (34.4% compared with 38.3%).[55] Between 2007 and 2017, *daily* cannabis use rose from 3.5% to 4.4%.[56] The latest available survey data indicate that cannabis use among college students is now the highest it has been during the last 30 years, with about 1 in 5

college students using cannabis during the past month,[57] and 9% using ten or more times per month.[58]

More than half (55%) of college administrators, including 95% of administrators working in residence or fraternity/sorority life, reported that cannabis use occurs in residence halls on campus.[59]

Despite the popular opinion that cannabis might offset heavy drinking, research studies support the opposite—cannabis users are more likely to drink excessively and use other drugs than non-users of cannabis.[60] Recent research has linked cannabis use to heightened risk for opioid misuse and opioid use disorder.[61]

In contrast to the cannabis use patterns of students attending college in the 20th century, new and serious problems are associated with how cannabis is being used on college campuses today. The average level of Tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) in cannabis, the main compound responsible for its mind-altering effects, increased from 3% in 1980 to 12% in 2012. And at retail establishments in Washington State, where cannabis is legalized, the average THC content for cannabis was found to be 21.2%.[62] The widespread availability of highly potent cannabis products (e.g., hash oil, and edibles),[63] and novel routes of administration (e.g., vaping)[64] can be associated with significant risks to learning and memory,[65] addiction potential,[66] mental health problems,[67] and impaired driving.[68] In short, the "scene" is very different from even a decade ago and has raised significant concerns among higher education leaders.

5. Prescription Drug Misuse

Prescription drug misuse, the use of a prescription drug without a physician's prescription or using more than what is prescribed, is also a concern. Available data suggest that about 1 in 7 college students have misused a prescription drug during the past year.[69] The national opioid overdose crisis has not spared college students. Although data are scarce with respect to the prevalence of opioid-related overdoses among college students, many colleges perceive this as a health threat and are ensuring that naloxone is available to reverse overdoses.[70]

About 1 in 10 college students engage in some form of prescription drug misuse, with stimulants being the most common form.[71] Nonmedical use of prescription stimulants like Adderall® and Ritalin® nearly doubled between 2008 and 2013.[72]

The prevalence of Adderall® use without medical supervision in 2017 was 9.5% for college students compared with 6.7% for their non-college peers.[73] Prescription drug misuse rarely occurs alone. In one study, 69.4% of students who misused prescription stimulants were excessive drinkers, and 67.8% used cannabis during the past month.[74] In fact, studies have shown that the misuse of prescription stimulants purportedly to improve academic performance is most likely a last-ditch attempt to compensate for declining academic performance that results from other forms of substance use, and in particular, cannabis use.[75] Improvement in grades is not seen among students who use stimulants nonmedically; the best grades are achieved by students who are non-users.[76]

6. Cocaine

Both cocaine use and cocaine-related overdose deaths are increasing nationwide. In 2017, 4.8% of full-time college students had used cocaine in the past year.[77] This number has been growing since 2013, when it was at a low of 2.7% among college students.[78] Furthermore, the dramatic surge in overdose deaths is likely driven by the fentanyl-laced cocaine epidemic. Fentanyl is a synthetic opioid that is terrifyingly potent; between 2012 and 2016, there was a 23-fold increase in overdoses involving cocaine and synthetic opioids, mainly fentanyl.[79] With the campus population using cocaine at increasing levels, college students are at a new, and higher, level of risk.

WHAT SHOULD COLLEGES DO?

A Broader Student Success Strategic Plan is Essential

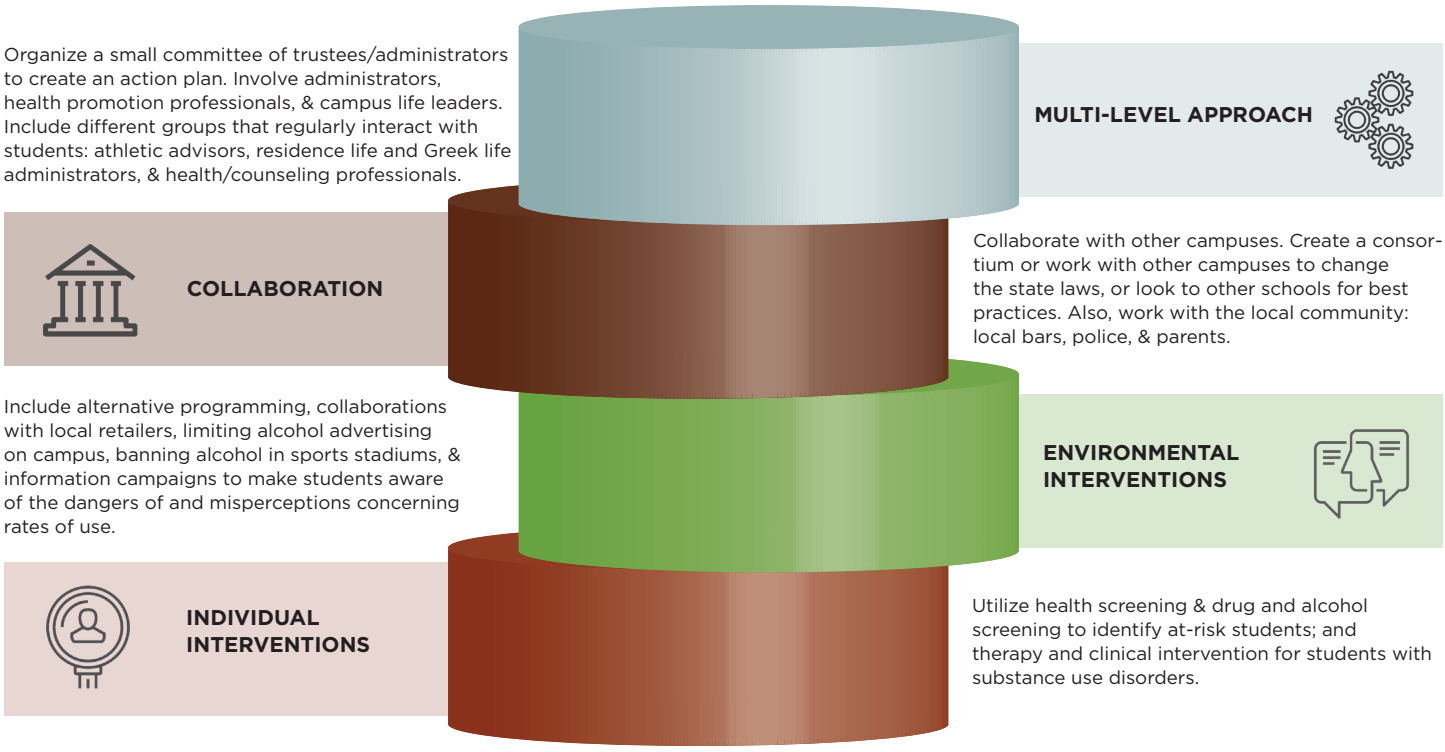
1. Broaden the Message

Effective information campaigns should not merely tell students about the dangerous effects of drugs and alcohol: There is much more to say. Many students already recognize some of the risks associated with substance abuse. A 2014 Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) study found that 76.6% of full-time college students perceived great risk of harm from trying heroin once or twice, and 63.9% perceived great risk of harm from daily excessive drinking. But being aware of general harms is not the same as recognizing the effect of habitual use on academic performance, the effect of use on decision-making and cognition, or the process of addiction. The same study found that only 32.0% of students perceived

great risk of harm from weekly, as opposed to daily, excessive drinking. And only 17.9% identified great harm from weekly cannabis use.[80] Students should also be made aware that using alcohol and cannabis can lower their GPA, decrease their overall ability to focus on their studies, and drain the enjoyment away from their educational experience.

Education about the importance of seeking help or helping a fellow student is essential. There must be a cohesive message throughout campus to facilitate access to services for students who need help. Access to useful information and resources can teach students how to discuss how a person's substance use is not only affecting them, but also others. Students should listen and let the individual share to the extent that he or she feels comfortable. By understanding the realities of substance use, the care for students in need on a college campus would become a shared responsibility, rather than allowing these individuals to be isolated.

MULTI-LEVEL APPROACH



2. Establish Leadership and Governance Structure

- **At the Level of the University**

To put these recommendations to work, governing boards should assign a small committee of trustees and administrators to address substance use, as the University of Vermont (UVM) did by convening a President's Committee to evaluate drug use at UVM and create an action plan.[81] Committees can leverage the expertise of personnel already employed by the institution and directly involved with addressing drug and alcohol use, supplemented, when needed, by national experts on substance use. A strategy that starts and ends in the campus health center is not fulfilling its potential to create campus-wide changes; a small, focused leadership committee can direct the creation of a true, campus-wide strategy.

- **At the Level of Other Campuses—Networking**

In addition to coordinating various university levels to improve existing strategies, these committees should reach out to other campuses in order to stay abreast of emerging best practices.

The Mary Christie Foundation and Hazelden Betty Ford Institute for Recovery Advocacy's survey of 523 college leaders, which included administrators working in academic affairs, student affairs, and student health, found that "Lack of resources, coordination, and information are seen as the three biggest barriers to prevention and enforcement."[82] But effective strategies do not always require hiring new experts or costly and time-consuming training. Instead, administrators, health promotion professionals, and campus life leaders can become aware of the existing campus resources and collaborate with local and state bodies as well as nearby campuses.

The Maryland Collaborative to Reduce College Drinking and Related Problems has tackled all three of the barriers to prevention cited by college administrators. The Maryland Collaborative is a network of 15 colleges and universities in the state that work together to reduce alcohol use on their campuses through data-driven strategies. The Collaborative utilizes a multi-level, multi-component

approach that encourages implementing interventions at both the environmental and individual levels. Providing information and training to multiple sectors of individuals who regularly interact with students (e.g., athletics, residence life, Greek life, and health and counseling centers) is a cornerstone of the approach. **According to Johns Hopkins University President Ronald J. Daniels, "The Maryland Collaborative provides the evidence-based approach we needed to tackle this serious issue facing so many universities."**

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The most promising campus efforts move in coordination with both the community and state government. In 2015, the Maryland General Assembly passed a ban on the retail sale of extreme-strength alcohol, and in 2018, it passed a ban on the sale of powdered alcohol. These decisions were supported by the Governance Council of the Maryland Collaborative, a body made up of 15 presidents from the Collaborative's member institutions. The Collaborative has also worked to develop "social host ordinances" that have reduced excessive drinking while also assisting communities and decreasing police calls: Baltimore City, Baltimore County, and the Town of Princess Anne have passed laws to reduce loud and unruly parties through more policing, civil citations, and suspensions of rental licenses.[83] The Maryland Collaborative's *Guide to Best Practices* is available online for consultation.[84]

In 2017, the University of Vermont (UVM) received a National Award for Work to Reduce High Risk Drinking from EVERFI, the creator of the Campus Prevention Network, which brings together institutions from across the country to share and implement substance abuse prevention strategies.[85] UVM's multi-pronged prevention initiative mobilizes parents, students, faculty,

and the wider community of Burlington. Since the program began, excessive drinking prevalence declined by a third, police calls for noise, intoxication, and disorderly conduct in student neighborhoods declined by a third, and the number of students requiring medical attention as a result of excessive drinking declined by half.[86]

The initiative started by convening a President's Committee to evaluate alcohol, cannabis, and other drug use on campus and create an action plan. This group included stakeholders at all levels—staff, faculty, students, and community partners. They began by evaluating the students and campus climate at UVM to identify the programs that would actually address their needs. Following the Committee's recommendations, UVM instituted and aggressively promoted alternative alcohol-free programming during high-risk events and weekends. They also informed parents about the safety and academic risks of substance abuse and encouraged them to talk with their students about these issues. The university has introduced universal screening for substance abuse where primary health care is delivered and improved the pipeline between screening and treatment. The Wellness Environment, a substance-free residence hall launched by the program, has grown from 80 to 1,200 students. UVM also collaborated with Burlington's police department and code enforcement to visit residents of housing units where alcohol- and drug-related incidents were reported, focusing on areas with the highest density of students.[87]

Substance-free residence halls are an important part of substance abuse prevention and recovery. SAMHSA has found that approximately 15% of adults ages 18 to 25 meet the criteria for substance use disorders, which means that colleges and universities can be instrumental in the recovery of students who are struggling with addiction.[88] Many institutions have risen to the occasion. Whereas in 2013 there were only 29 substance abuse recovery programs on campuses across the nation, the Association of Recovery in Higher Education now reports 186 such programs.[89] These recovery communities create a network of support and accountability through substance-free housing, recovery meetings, counseling, and sober social events. Augsburg University's recovery initiative StepUP is the largest residential collegiate recovery program in the United States. The program commits itself not only to offering an alcohol-free

space, but also to helping students develop the habits needed to achieve growth in their recovery and in their academic endeavors: StepUP students average a 3.2 GPA. Staffed by licensed counselors specializing both in addiction and mental health, StepUP offers weekly counseling sessions, group meetings, and leadership and service opportunities.[90] Robust recovery programs that are visible to the campus community help dismantle the standard of a drug- and alcohol-based party culture. They emphasize healthy choices and give students who are struggling with addiction, and those who are at risk of developing problems, a real chance to succeed academically.

These programs are successful because they work to initiate both on-campus and off-campus change with the purpose of creating an environment where students can thrive academically. Their policies are evidence-based: They are chosen to address the specific harm that substance abuse poses to college students as documented by nationwide studies of higher education institutions, and augmented by surveys that institutions conduct of their own student bodies. They are crafted to respond to the unique needs of administrators, students, and citizens of a particular university community. While strategies vary, successful policies include multiple levels of university life and simultaneously incorporate several of the recommendations discussed in this guide: improving screenings that focus on and identify academic barriers that are caused or exacerbated by substance abuse; reducing the availability of drugs and alcohol; correcting false assumptions students have about the scale and frequency of use; and providing alternative recreational programming.

3. Strengthen the Academic Mission

There are structural changes that can reduce substance use while prioritizing academics. Even as pedestrian a tactic as increasing the number of Friday classes can be remarkably effective. Students who do not have Friday classes drink twice as much alcohol on Thursday nights as their peers who must make an early lecture, an effect found to be greater both among males and participants in the Greek system. Scheduling more classes on Friday mornings, especially before 10 a.m., therefore could help to reduce excessive drinking the night before.[91] (This also, of course, prepares students for the normal hours of the working world.)

Prioritizing the academic mission, and creating an environment that facilitates student success, can be crucial to building a safe campus. Substance abuse must not be the unremarked "elephant on campus." Institutions that do little to confront their "party culture" or appropriately address harmful student behaviors are implicitly sending the message that academic standards come second to recreation. A counterweight to reducing the appeal of substance use is to provide an engaging education that helps students ignite their personal passions and cultivate critical-thinking skills.

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By communicating the seriousness of academic study, colleges prioritize their educational mission in direct opposition to the vision of the undergraduate career as a four-year tour through college town bars. Institutions must redouble their commitment to the foundational charge of the university: inspiring students to develop meaningful academic and professional goals and the skills to realize them.

4. Review, Refine, and Enforce Policies

Sanctions for violating policies must be sensible and geared toward getting high-risk students the help they need to change their behavior. Information campaigns will not reduce substance abuse if institutions do not also reduce the availability of alcohol and other drugs. While trustees cannot directly control the availability of alcohol at an off-campus party, they can develop policies that make alcohol harder to obtain. Effective tactics include: increasing identification checks at on-campus events, limiting alcohol advertisement on campus, collaborating with local retailers, and banning alcohol use in university venues like sports stadiums.

5. Utilize Environmental-level Approaches

Reducing alcohol and drug use on campus in positive ways can even add excitement to the undergraduate experience. One of the most essential skills for a successful undergraduate career and future work-life is learning how to balance professional commitments with relaxation and recreation. Institutions can offer career-building opportunities, networking, and skill-building sessions on Fridays and Saturdays that give students alternatives to weekend parties where drug and alcohol use is likely. Through such programming, universities can reaffirm their commitment to enriching the lives of their students in a manner that adds to the enjoyment of the academic experience. These activities provide different ways for students to interact socially with each other and develop positive social skills apart from gatherings that revolve around drinking. Offering alternative events on Thursday nights, weekends, and in coincidence with community events that pose high drinking risks has been successful for many institutions. More research is needed to understand the best ways to implement alternative programming to maximize impact in reducing high-risk behavior.

During the week of the Grand Prix in Indianapolis, Purdue University works with students to offer 30 different alternative events, including cookouts, athletic activities, movies, and racing festivities. The goal of these events is to "empower student organization leaders" to help fix underage and high-risk drinking problems at Purdue. "By providing substance-free choices for Purdue students," the university seeks to have "fewer acts of violence and vandalism . . . and fewer negative consequences from alcohol."[92] To make these programs effective in both preventing drug and alcohol abuse and bringing about changes in campus culture, alternative events must be well-advertised, especially among key groups like freshmen, fraternities, and sororities. Allowing students agency in the process facilitates student buy-in and makes drug and alcohol prevention a collective, positive effort.

Some evidence exists for the success of such strategies. Student Affairs at Pennsylvania State University collected data on freshmen to evaluate Late-Night Penn State (LNPS), an alcohol-free programming initiative that encourages students to lead, plan, and co-sponsor activities. They found that students "drank less on days they attended LNPS and on days they stayed in" as opposed to attending "bars/parties,

other campus events, or entertainment." While 24.3% of students who did not attend weekend LNPS events reported any drinking and 14.9% reported excessive drinking, only 11.4% of those who took part in the alcohol-free events reported drinking and just 4.6% reported excessive drinking.[93] The strength of alternative programming is that it comes as a bottom-up effort, directly working in partnership with students to change the way they think of and approach alcohol and drug consumption.

The State University of New York–New Paltz has built a mutually-beneficial relationship with local taverns that encourages lawful consumption, strengthens the connection between the school and the community, and documents the harms that alcohol abuse poses to both safety and academic success. Tavern owners changed the way they advertise alcohol to college students to emphasize civic responsibility, and discontinued inexpensive drink specials that were offered to compete with students' house parties. These efforts have resulted in "better profits, fewer alcohol-fueled altercations, and fewer arrests in their establishments." Additionally, when a student is disruptive or involved with illegal behavior in local bars, the college is notified and sends a letter to the student "indicating its awareness of such behavior and a reminder that such incidents may be subject to the campus judicial process."[94]

By joining forces with community partners, neighborhood organizations, and local law enforcement, institutions can find ways to reinforce their strategies off-campus and ensure that they are not duplicating efforts.

6. Utilize Individual-level Approaches

- **Utilize widespread screening tools that are validated to identify at-risk students.**

  Screening students to identify individuals who might be at risk for drug or alcohol problems is an important first step toward addressing substance use issues. Screenings are often conducted when students violate alcohol policies, but making screening a routine part of campus health center visits is essential and recommended by several national health organizations.[95] More levels of university personnel should be trained to recognize that these problems are obstacles to

academic success so that they can refer students of concern to the health and/or counseling center to receive additional help. It is important to include personnel working with fraternities and sororities, as well as those in student conduct and safety, who will oftentimes be the first to respond to substance-related incidents and who are part of the disciplinary process.[96] Resident advisors, who are directly active in maintaining quality of life in dormitories, should be included. Athletic staff should also be aware of the importance of screening as substance abuse is not infrequent among athletes.[97]

The most common response to cannabis use on campus is disciplinary action.[98] On its own, this is not likely to be the most effective response. Proactive screening ensures that students who are already experiencing or at risk for adverse consequences are not merely disciplined for violating policy, but also receive therapeutic follow-up. One such screening tool for identifying students at risk for cannabis use problems is the CUDIT-R (Cannabis Use Disorder Identification Test). [99]

More accessible screening does not preclude alerting students to the illegality of substance use, the potential legal consequences of their abuse, or the disciplinary policies of their institution, but its overarching purpose is to identify at-risk students and put them back on track.

University personnel should be encouraged to discuss proactively academic engagement with students to understand the "roots" of skipping/dropping classes, difficulties with studying or concentration, or decreases in motivation. Students should be encouraged to think about the causes of these deficits, which can be related to drug and alcohol use. At screenings, students should be made aware of how seriously alcohol and cannabis use are related to lower GPAs and weaker academic performance. The Measure of Obstacles to Succeeding Academically in College (MOSAIC) screening method is a tool that assesses a wide range of impediments to academic success and directs students to the appropriate resources on campus to address them.[100] These sessions should be brief, removing the prospect of prolonged sessions that typically have little appeal for students. This method can result in more personalized, expedited referrals to the services that will most appropriately help students make positive changes.

- **Utilize evidence-based clinical interventions to address substance abuse.**

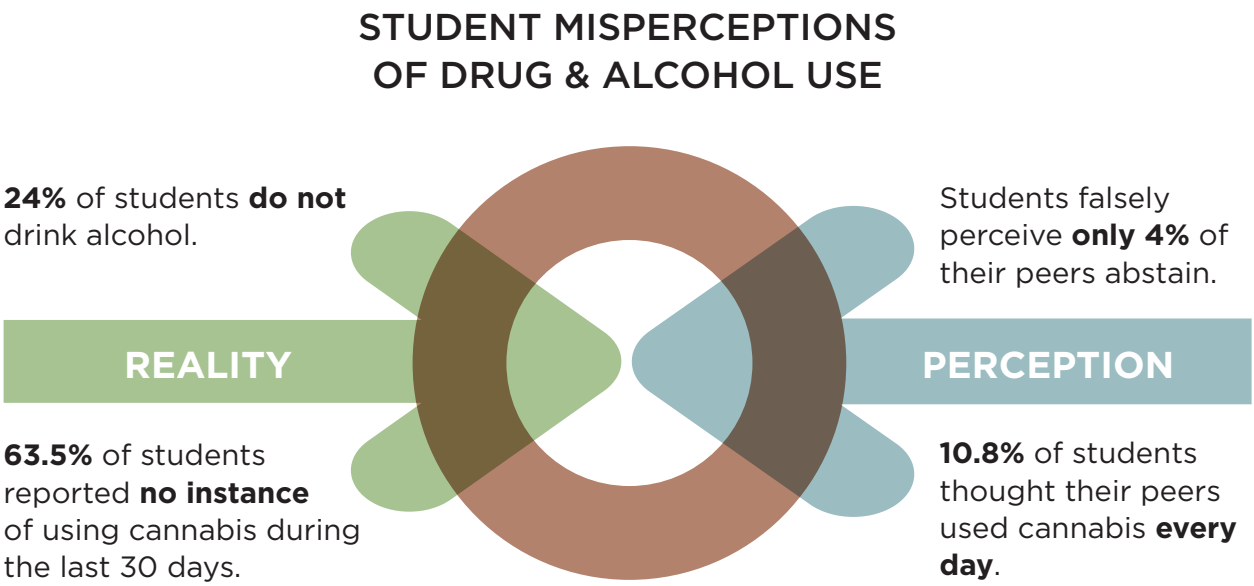
After screening, for students that are identified as having substance use problems, cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) and motivational enhancement therapy (MET) can be successful strategies for addressing the problem therapeutically. Many colleges do not have well-staffed health centers, and if they do, lack the necessary resources to offer these evidence-based interventions systematically. CBT emphasizes identification and management of thought patterns and external triggers that lead to use, teaches coping and problem-solving skills, and promotes substitution of drug-related behaviors with healthier alternatives. MET builds self-efficacy for positive behavior changes in an empathic and non-judgmental way.[101] New treatment research points to the importance of addressing boredom and developing coping mechanisms to reduce student cannabis use.[102] Because cannabis users often use other drugs, clinicians are faced with a more complicated clinical presentation that usually requires more intensity—at least four sessions[103] and longer-term monitoring. Because the clinical presentation of college students who misuse prescription drugs is also typically complicated by excessive drinking and use of cannabis and other drugs, existing research indicates that these students will require even more clinical attention.[104] Clinical staff in campus health and counseling centers are often generalists and seldom have the benefit of ongoing training and technical assistance regarding these complexities of treating problematic substance use.

7. **Correct misperceptions about the prevalence, benign nature, and "rite of passage" harmlessness of heavy drinking and cannabis use.**

College leaders must avoid assuming that excessive drinking and substance use is a normal part of college life. Doing so can lend the appearance of granting permission for an activity that is illegal for most undergraduates. These misunderstandings carry grave consequences. **When students consider substance use to be a normal, widely-practiced activity, they are more likely to take part themselves**.[105]

Therefore, correcting the false perceptions students have of the rates at which alcohol and drugs are used by their peers is an integral part of data-driven prevention strategies. While 75.8% of students report some level of alcohol use during the past year, college officials should not lose sight of the other side of the coin: 24.2% of students do *not* drink,[106] yet students falsely perceive that only 4.0% of their peers abstain.

The discrepancy persists in students' perception of cannabis use: 63.5% of students reported no instance of using cannabis during the last 30 days, while 10.8% of students thought their peers were using the substance each day.[107] A study of 5,990 college students found that one-third of students use cannabis and two-thirds do not. However, 98% of those students incorrectly assumed that their peers use the drug at least once per year.[108]



Even before they enroll, young adults often regard excessive drinking as a central part of social life on many campuses. Barstool Sports, for example, is a popular blog among college and high school students that showcases college drinking on social media pages with millions of followers. These pages feature videos of university students chugging drinks, fighting, falling off roofs, and engaging in similar foolhardy and dangerous practices under the influence of alcohol. Environments already charged by the significant pressure to conform, like Greek organizations and college parties, tend to intensify the abuse of alcohol and drugs. Compared with students who have abstained from drinking during high school, students who have had drinking experiences during high school are more likely to drink excessively. Students who do not conform often feel relegated to an "out-group," because they "are not participating in the normative behavior of alcohol use." Because of this perceived stigma, some who enter college resolved to abstain from alcohol abuse often "give into peer pressure . . . in hopes to be socially accepted and have a successful transition to college."[109]

- **An Effective Data-driven Prevention Strategy in Action**

Information campaigns should publicize the misperceptions that students have about substance use and provide the correct data. These types of prevention strategies are termed "social re-norming." Although the benefits of social re-norming are not fully documented, some institutions have experienced success with these strategies. At Hobart and William Smith Colleges (HWS), high-risk drinking rates declined by 21% following a social re-norming marketing campaign.[110]

In an interview, Dr. H. Wesley Perkins, who partnered with Professor David Craig to create the "Social Norms Approach" at HWS, explained the reasoning behind social re-norming campaigns:

> "Reports might indicate that 25% of the students on a campus are frequent 'binge' drinkers. Yet simply announcing this finding to a student body also contributes to an overall belief that alcohol abuse and student life go hand in hand, and it indirectly helps reinforce the false notion that most students view frequent intoxication as acceptable. We could report, on the other hand, that 75% of the student body does NOT engage in frequent 'binge' drinking. This would reinforce the attitudes and behaviors of those who do not engage . . . in essence, it would help empower them to avoid such behaviors."[111]

HWS began their effort to correct students' false notions first by "gathering credible data about [drinking and other drug] use" and then "intensively communicat[ing] the actual healthy norms through media campaigns, interactive programs, and other educational venues." Some of the posters that are part of the current prevention program at HWS highlight the positive ways that students are dealing with the pressure to abuse drugs and alcohol through publicizing the results gathered from a 2015 survey of 879 HWS students. For example, one poster articulates: "88% of HWS students NEVER cut class as a result of drinking during the academic year." Another says: "77% of HWS students agree 'It's easy to make friends at this school without drinking alcohol.'" The posters also bring attention to the number of students on campus who avoid the negative consequences associated with substance abuse: "96% of HWS students NEVER

cause physical injury to others as a result of drinking during the academic year." Each fact includes a clear citation and directs students to where they can find more information.[112]

Studies have shown that students follow the lead of their peers when making decisions about substance abuse. When students recognize that their campus does not implicitly tolerate the harmful behaviors associated with drugs and alcohol by remaining silent, and are made aware of the real rates at which their peers abstain from drugs and alcohol, they are likely to be motivated to follow suit.

8. Collect Data to Target Interventions and Monitor Progress

A data-driven approach to substance abuse prevention requires universities to gather the facts on the effects of substance abuse and ensure that students are aware of them by circulating the information in accessible ways. Trustees and administrators who face particularly challenging situations should survey their own institutions to uncover the number of students on their campus who are using drugs and alcohol, the frequency of use, and the social situations and venues where substance abuse most often takes place. After gathering this specific information, institutions will be able to evaluate where their resources and efforts are best spent: for example, focusing intensively on Greek life or other student demographics, monitoring certain types of activities like major athletic events, or working with local establishments where alcohol is served.

9. Publicize the Evidence

By directly publicizing both the evidence of the harmful effects of substance abuse and the resources available to help students, California State University–Chico reduced alcohol violations from 827 to 341 in four years. Chico directly educated students through "websites, door hangers, personal dorm walk-throughs from the university president and police (friendly visits, not sting operations), and various forms of literature—all with the goal of making sure students know how much is too much, what happens when you get caught, and where and how to find help when you need it."[113] This approach in no way encouraged substance use as permissible: It acknowledged the problem, provided students with relevant information on the personal, academic, and physical risks of substance abuse, and showed them

where to get help if they were not successful. The accomplishments of this program demonstrate the importance of collaboration on all university levels—from top administrators to university housing—and with the local community. When more areas of campus life are engaged, the burden of tackling substance use is shared, not just the responsibility of one committee or a few health-and-wellness counselors.

CONCLUSION: *There is Hope*

The concerns outlined in this guide are urgent. Student substance use affects every area of the university—from academics to resident life, from safety to student engagement. But the good news is that the biggest barriers to addressing the problems cited by campus leaders—lack of information, resources, and coordination—are already being tackled at colleges and universities across the country. The approaches outlined in this report have been found to be successful. There has been encouraging progress. Presidents of major public universities are taking stands to issue scorecards on substance abuse for fraternities and sororities and enforce sanctions. Institutions have come together to form networks like the Maryland Collaborative to share prevention strategies and influence state policy.

This guide provides the most recent national data on college substance use—including the prevalence of the most widely-used addictive substances, the effect of substance use on student safety, and the impact on academic performance and engagement. Armed with the facts on the scope of student substance use and its very real consequences, trustees can use this information as a foundation to start evaluating the challenges at their own institutions, and can explore implementing the methods recommended in this report as part of a comprehensive strategy to reduce student substance use, one that involves both prevention and intervention.

This guide outlines strategies for coordination at various levels of the university, and also recommends that institutions should reach out to other campuses in order to stay abreast of emerging best practices. Reducing substance use is not a feat that trustees can accomplish by themselves, nor can a single institution overcome the more foundational challenge of reversing the view of substance use as a "rite of passage" in the college years. But the strategies evaluated in this report can have powerful effects, reducing the number of students who abuse alcohol, cannabis, and

other harmful substances on individual campuses. And collaborating with other institutions will magnify the impact. University leaders must share effective strategies that have worked for their respective institutions and consider broader policies at the local and state levels. Statewide initiatives can help solve states' long-term problems, and these initiatives can also garner state funding.

Together, college leadership can help to impress upon students from every region that they must not allow substance use to interfere with the precious opportunity that college students have to learn and grow.

■ ■ ■

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"Simply stated, college presidents and governing boards need to read this essay and implement its recommendations. As president of the University of Colorado, one of my very first acts in office was to rein in a culture of hard drinking that was eroding campus morale and our academic mission: such problems are all too common. ACTA has done an important service to higher education and the nation in making clear that no institution can feel secure from the danger and damage of campus substance use and alerting college leadership to the effective remedies available to them. Our duty as educators is to the well-being and success of our students. It is urgent that we act, and act effectively."

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