

# Current Thinking on Alcohol Abuse

## The NIAAA Call to Action<sup>1</sup>

In 2002, the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA) released a report titled *A Call to Action: Changing the Culture of Drinking at U.S. Colleges*. A task force comprised of college presidents, alcohol researchers, and students developed this report by seeking out the current trends in alcohol use in higher education and analyzing the resources currently combating alcohol abuse on college and university campuses. This report focused on three main issues:

1. Summarizing the scope of the problem
2. The effectiveness of programs used by schools and communities
3. A summary of recommendations designed to improve prevention efforts

One of the outcomes of the *Call to Action* was the creation of the website [collegedrinkingprevention.gov](http://collegedrinkingprevention.gov). This website includes the entire report and is separated into action plans for the following constituents:

- College Presidents
- College Parents
- College Students
- High School Administrators
- High School Parents and Students



What follows are some of the highlights from the NIAAA report. As the “Home for Peer Education”, *The BACCHUS Network*<sup>™</sup> is quite proud of the fact that the NIAAA Task Force singles out peer educators as a proactive force in fighting alcohol abuse. In their publication titled “What Peer Educators and Resident Advisors (RAs) Need to Know About College Drinking”, they list the following reasons why it is important to reach out to peer educators:

- Peer educators are trusted by classmates to provide reliable answers and accurate information, regardless of health topic.
- Peer educators have hands-on knowledge that enables them to interpret the NIAAA report from a different perspective.
- Peer educators are a very important link between the administration and student body.
- Peer educators can assist college presidents in reducing underage and excessive drinking.
- Peer educators’ input can make college alcohol abuse prevention programs more successful.

## Recommendations for Colleges and Universities

To change the culture of drinking on campus, the NIAAA Task Force recommends that all colleges and universities adopt the following 3-in-1 Overarching Framework approach for program development. In addition, program planners should select appropriate strategies from among those presented in the report to tailor events to the special needs of their campus.



## The 3-in-1 Overarching Framework

The research strongly supports the use of comprehensive, integrated programs with multiple complementary components that target:

- Individuals, including at-risk or alcohol-dependent drinkers
- Student population as a whole
- College and surrounding community

The 3-in-1 Framework presented here focuses on each of the three primary audiences. The NIAAA Task Force members agree that the framework is a useful introduction to encourage presidents, administrators, college prevention specialists, students, and community members to think in a broad and comprehensive fashion about college drinking. It is designed to encourage consideration of multiple audiences on and off campus. The Task Force offers the 3-in-1 Framework as a starting point to develop effective and science-based prevention efforts.

The brief descriptions that follow provide the rationale for emphasizing these three targets in prevention programs and identify prevention strategies that address each group.

### Individuals, Including At-Risk or Alcohol-Dependent Drinkers

The risk for alcohol problems exists along a continuum. Targeting only students with identified drinking problems misses those who drink heavily or misuse alcohol occasionally (e.g. those who drink and drive from time to time). In fact, non-dependent, high-risk drinkers account for the majority of alcohol-related problems. It is crucial to support strategies that assist individual students identified as problem, at-risk, or alcohol-dependent drinkers.

Strategies are clearly needed to engage these students as early as possible in appropriate screening and intervention services, whether provided on campus or through referral to specialized community based services. One important effort to increase on-campus screening is National Alcohol Screening Day, an event that takes place in April each year. This program, supported by the NIAAA and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), provides free, anonymous testing and health information at a growing number of colleges and universities.

### Student Population as a Whole

The key to affecting the behavior of the general student population is to address the factors that encourage high-risk drinking. They include:

- Widespread availability of alcoholic beverages to underage and intoxicated students
- Aggressive social and commercial promotions of alcohol
- Large amounts of unstructured student time
- Inconsistent publicity and enforcement of laws and campus policies
- Student perceptions of heavy alcohol use as the norm

Specific strategies useful in addressing these problem areas tend to vary by school. Examples of some of the most promising strategies appear in the "Recommended Strategies" section of the report ([collegedrinkingprevention.gov/NIAAACollegeMaterials/TaskForce/CallToAction\\_02.aspx](http://collegedrinkingprevention.gov/NIAAACollegeMaterials/TaskForce/CallToAction_02.aspx)).

**What To Do For Alcohol Poisoning**

**Symptoms:**

- Person is passed out and cannot be awakened.
- Person has cold, clammy or bluish skin color.
- Person has slow or irregular breaths:
  - less than 8 times per minute or
  - more than 10 seconds in between breaths.
- Person is vomiting and does not wake up.

*If any of these symptoms exist,  
call for help IMMEDIATELY!*

**If Your Friend is Intoxicated:**

- Get your friend to a safe place.
- Do not leave your friend alone; monitor breathing.
- Turn your friend on his/her side to prevent choking.
- Check for signs of alcohol poisoning.

**If you're not sure if your friend needs help, Call 911**

*Friends Take Care of Friends*

**I pledge:**

- To make responsible decisions if I choose to drink
- To not drive impaired or allow my friends to drive impaired
- To watch out for my friends and their safety
- To call for help if any indications of alcohol poisoning exist
- To not be angry if my friend seeks help for me if I am in danger

[www.bacchusnetwork.org](http://www.bacchusnetwork.org)

## College and the Surrounding Community

Mutually reinforcing interventions between the college and surrounding community can change the broader environment and help reduce alcohol abuse and alcohol-related problems over the long term. When college drinking is reframed as a community as well as a college problem, campus and community leaders are more likely to come together to address it comprehensively. The joint activities that typically result help produce policy and enforcement reforms that, in turn, affect the total drinking environment. Campus and community alliances also improve relationships overall and enable key groups such as student affairs offices, residence life directors, local police, retail alcohol outlets, and the court system to work cooperatively in resolving issues involving alcohol.

## Multivariate Perspective

What does a multivariate perspective mean? Alcohol research clearly indicates that multiple factors interact to produce various drinking patterns. Factors include:

- Students' genetic/biological characteristics
- Family and cultural backgrounds and environments
- Previous drinking experiences in high school
- Environment of the college in which they are enrolled

Even within one college, patterns may be influenced by students' participation in fraternities, sororities, sports teams, or other social groups. Research now has the capacity to bring this enlarged perspective to the problem of college drinking and to test models that take into account many of these factors.

*Note: Parenthetical references from the original document have been omitted for readability. A complete reference page appears at the end of the report located at [collegedrinkingprevention.gov](http://collegedrinkingprevention.gov)*

## NIAAA 2007 Update: What Colleges Need to Know Now<sup>3</sup>

In November 2007, the NIAAA released an update to their 2002 *Call to Action*, titled *What Colleges Need to Know Now: An Update on College Drinking Research*. As discussed in this manual, the NIAAA originally outlined four tiers of strategies to prevent alcohol abuse within the college population, based on scientific research. The 2002 report also emphasized the 3-in-1 Framework. The 2007 update begins to report on progress and emphasizes the importance of collaboration between the campus and its surrounding communities. A few highlights are included here.

- In a study examining the effect of either an in-person brief motivational intervention or an alcohol education session for students mandated for prevention (i.e., policy violators), both groups showed decreases in high-risk drinking. However, those students who participated in the brief MI reported fewer alcohol-related problems.
- Students most in need of a prevention intervention appear to be least likely to seek out this assistance. Using arenas students may frequent for other reasons, such as a health or counseling centers, and using trained student peers to help implement the intervention, is receiving support in the research.
- As called for in the 2002 report, additional research is being conducted on the outcomes of campus-community coalitions. One study documented a "considerable drop" in student reports of driving after drinking, following a social marketing campaign, high media coverage, and strong enforcement efforts (i.e., DUI checkpoints).
- Research continues to support that the best campus prevention programs integrate multiple approaches.

To download a copy of the NIAAA's 2007 update, visit [collegedrinkingprevention.gov](http://collegedrinkingprevention.gov)

## Promising Practices: Campus Alcohol Strategies

*Promising Practices* is a 2001 project authored by David Anderson, Ph.D. and Gail Milgram, Ed.D. and funded by The Century Council. As a result of the project *The Source Book*, a 400 plus page book highlighting program strategies and prevention initiatives at America's colleges and universities, was created from research at a wide range of institutions of higher education. The following is a brief summary of the project's findings and recommendations. To read these highlights in their entirety or to learn more information about Promising Practices and *The Source Book*, please visit [promprac.gmu.edu](http://promprac.gmu.edu)

### Findings and Observations

The following ten key elements reflect an overall perspective on the status of campus prevention efforts:

#### 1. The campus-based approaches manifest rich diversity and creativity.

Campus efforts demonstrate a wide range of strategies and approaches. Some topic areas, such as awareness and targeted prevention, lend themselves to creative initiatives; others, such as enforcement, are less likely to incorporate innovative approaches.

#### 2. Although comprehensive campus-based efforts are desired, a fully comprehensive approach is rarely achieved.

Though campus personnel increasingly acknowledge the need for a comprehensive campus-based initiative, they often find it difficult to garner the resources for full implementation. The important role that multiple constituencies can play in accomplishing the desired outcome of a comprehensive campus effort is acknowledged; however, campuses tend to implement a limited range of programs, policies, or other initiatives, many of which focus on a social norms marketing approach. This tends to both incorporate a range of previously unconnected program elements and use available resources.

#### 3. Campus initiatives often do not clearly articulate desired outcomes.

With constraints on campus programs and personnel, having clearly established desired outcomes is extremely important. In workshops with campus and community personnel, a clearer understanding of the desired results from specific campus initiatives is evident.

#### 4. Evaluation of campus initiatives is rare.

Evaluation is quite limited and evaluation is focused on outcomes. Though many campuses use the Core Survey, many other campuses are developing instruments and protocols that are more directly associated to the goals of their project.

#### 5. Awareness, peer-based, environmental, and targeted efforts dominate campuses efforts.

The overwhelming majority of programs were in one or more of these topic areas. They illustrate the diversity and creativity found in alcohol abuse prevention programming efforts. In other words, educators recognize the need for programs that emphasize the unique needs and circumstances of populations within the overall university campus and community framework.

#### 6. Many alcohol abuse prevention strategies are blended with health-oriented approaches.

Alcohol abuse prevention was found to be incorporated in a range of strategies and approaches, demonstrating that prevention efforts can be included within many strategies and approaches overall. Typical linkages with alcohol abuse prevention have been found with impaired driving, academic performance, overall human development, acquaintance rape, violence, and healthy living.





## **7. New approaches appear to be emerging in campus efforts.**

While curricular infusion was more widespread than anticipated, other new approaches for alcohol abuse prevention are being found. Innovative initiatives for enforcement, scientifically grounded strategies, and an increased involvement of task forces are three new prevention approaches. Further, a respect for and involvement with the community surrounding the campus is emerging. As previously noted, social norms marketing has increased substantially in campus programming efforts.

## **8. There is insufficient consistency in the delivery of the “message”.**

Campuses often lack clarity about what is to be communicated, what is to be measured, and what the desired outcomes are. Programming efforts appear disconnected and individualized, resulting in limited consistency and clarity about the message being communicated to the student population. The processes undertaken through this project indicate that what the campus is promoting or preventing—whether it is harm reduction, risk avoidance, environmental change, individual self determination, or personal understanding of consequences—is often not articulated and discussed.

## **9. Insufficient marketing of approaches is common.**

While marketing, as a campus-based effort, has improved significantly over the past five years, there is still much room for improvement. The largest factor believed to have helped marketing efforts has been social norms marketing campaigns that emphasize correcting misperceptions of campus norms. These campaigns are becoming more frequent. Marketing continues to be a factor in the success of campus efforts.

## **10. Personnel guiding these efforts have tremendous dedication but limited support.**

Campus leadership personnel, such as student affairs, police officers, health center staff, coordinators of campus efforts, and faculty, have dedication, however, limited resources and lack of attention from the campus’ senior administrators typically hampers the campus personnel who are guiding the efforts. The challenges these leadership personnel face are so widespread and infused into the societal and institutional framework that it makes change difficult.

## **Recommendations**

### **1. Integrate alcohol abuse prevention efforts into the fabric of the institution.**

Alcohol abuse prevention is best served when it is integral to the operations and activities of the institutions. Just as these efforts need to be grounded in the overall mission of the institution, it is similarly important that they be viewed as a shared responsibility among the institution’s personnel. It is hoped that each campus and each organizational unit within a campus will consider how it can be involved in the prevention of a response to alcohol related problems.

### **2. Ensure that efforts are clearly defined.**

There is an increased call for science-based efforts in college alcohol abuse prevention. The growing emphasis upon evaluation and quality results demands that campus prevention efforts adhere to this set of standards. Clearly defining the desired outcomes and specifying the assumptions surrounding student behavior and growth will further enhance prevention initiatives.

### **3. Create a comprehensive and long-term perspective.**

Since it is widely known that initiation with alcohol generally precedes attendance at college and that alcohol issues are societal issues, colleges must undertake a wide variety of approaches and sustain these over time to have meaningful results. Changing the campus culture goes hand in hand with changing the culture of the surrounding community and the greater societal culture.

### **4. Design campus initiatives to be multi-targeted and broad-based.**

The diversity of campus populations and sub-populations indicates the essential need to have multi-targeted efforts. Approaches targeting different sub-populations on and off campus, as well as those who are not students, are both appropriate and necessary.

Attention to the range of drinking patterns, prevention efforts, interventions, and support are needed along with movement toward lower risk behaviors and environments. These trends help to establish the broad foundation of campus initiatives.



## **5. Allocate appropriate resources and staff commensurate with the task.**

To adequately implement a comprehensive campus effort, it is critical that sufficient resources and personnel be assigned to this long-term and comprehensive task. It is not reasonable to expect a single individual to be proficient in student counseling, group workshops, lectures, interactions with the media, marketing, evaluation design, interpretation of data, research, public interactions, course preparation, policy development, enforcement, administration and more. However, all too often it is precisely this range of tasks that is expected of one person. The investment of resources and personnel, when grounded within the comprehensive and theoretically based evaluated campus efforts, is highly recommended.

## **6. Build program connections on and off the campus.**

Not only are more resources necessary on the campus, linkages with off campus personnel and the surrounding community is also necessary. Connecting with alumni, parents, and state officials can be extremely helpful. These individuals and groups are increasingly selected as partners in the process of defining and implementing appropriate campus-based strategies. This collaboration and support helps to share resources, perspectives and insights.

## **7. Collaborate with other professionals.**

By sharing the insights, successes, and gaps, professionals can continue their quest for higher quality and more effective approaches. Collaboration also helps to offset the all too prominent sense of isolation faced both on and off campus. It is also recommended that this collaboration occur with those for whom alcohol abuse prevention is not a specialty: this may include parents, students, community members, and others. Further, collaboration may occur with professionals whose areas of expertise offer insights; these may be found in business, marketing, public policy, ethics, organization development, and technology.

## **8. Conduct and use on-going evaluation.**

Evaluation is an integral part of any campus-based effort. From the needs assessment process to the development of sound outcome and process evaluation methodologies, it is critical that evaluation be incorporated at all phases of the alcohol abuse prevention initiative. Having an ongoing “feedback loop” is central in continuing the improvement of the design and delivery of campus efforts.

## **9. Clearly define the message and market the initiative.**

As noted, campus based efforts are increasingly marketing the messages about their overall alcohol abuse prevention effort. This is helpful in changing the awareness of campus norms as well as correcting misperceptions on the campus. Marketing the positive results obtained from the campus efforts can be helpful in further generating support and ultimately a positive assessment of the campus programs.

## **10. Solicit support from the top and bottom of the campus hierarchy.**

The growing awareness of the shared responsibility for alcohol abuse prevention supports the understanding that all groups and organizations have a role to play in a comprehensive campus-based prevention. However, the need for support from the leadership at the top of the institution is critical; this includes the chancellor, the board of trustees, the president, and chief administrative officers. Each of these key leadership individuals and groups significantly shapes the direction and scope of campus efforts.

## **Summary**

It is our belief that the implementation of these recommendations will yield better results for the campus community. We believe that careful and thoughtful integration and incorporation of these recommendations will help campus professionals who are charged with alcohol abuse prevention, as well as others on the campus, to “work smarter, not harder”. We recognize the efforts of our affiliates who implement the use of the best practices on their campus, and understand that the balance lays in being comprehensive, multi-component, integrated, sufficient in “dose” and follow-up, interactive, institutionalized, and always involving the students.

## Screening and Brief Intervention in the College Population

Under a Cooperative Agreement with the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, The BACCHUS Network™ developed the screening and brief intervention (SBI) tool kit for the college population. The *Screening and Brief Intervention Tool Kit for College and University Campuses* can be used to decrease alcohol abuse and its related problems. SBI has been documented as an effective strategy within medical settings, prompting its exploration in other settings such as college campuses and workplaces.

SBI is a structured set of questions with a brief follow-up discussion between a person and a counselor or health care provider. It utilizes motivational interviewing and cognitive behavior intervention strategies, techniques identified as effective with the collegiate age group by the NIAAA.

The tool kit contains the following items:

- Instructions for conducting a brief screening
- AUDIT instrument for screening (The AUDIT (Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test) is a 10-question tool developed by the World Health Organization to identify people whose alcohol consumption has become hazardous or harmful.)
- Handouts on the effects of alcohol, lower-risk drinking strategies, and recommended drinking guidelines
- Tool kit evaluation form to provide feedback for future improvement
- Sample flyer to advertise free screening events

To access the tool kit, visit the BACCHUS site [friendsdrivesober.org](http://friendsdrivesober.org)



**In March 2007 the Office of the Surgeon General released a *Call to Action to Prevent and Reduce Underage Drinking*. This resource does include goals that relate to the college-age population. A copy of the Call to Action as well as additional resources can be found at [surgeongeneral.gov/topics/underagedrinking](http://surgeongeneral.gov/topics/underagedrinking)**

### Effective Prevention: Model Programs

In 2007, the Higher Education Center for Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse and Violence Prevention published *Experiences in Effective Prevention: The U.S. Department of Education's Alcohol and Other Drug Prevention Models on College Campuses Grants*. The 86-page publication highlights elements of effective alcohol and other drug prevention programs, utilizing the experiences of 22 campuses that received these model program grants from 1999-2004. To access the publication, visit [highereducationcenter.org/services/publications/experiences-effective-prevention](http://highereducationcenter.org/services/publications/experiences-effective-prevention)

## Correcting The Misperception

**According to the ACHA-NCHA Spring 2007 Survey, college students believed that 37.7% of their peers used alcohol daily, however, only 0.6% self-reported daily use. <sup>4</sup>**