

Jordy Voss

ENGL 1010 / Adams

Essay 4

August 2, 2017

Hungover in Academia

All across America, students who have recently graduated from high school are packing their bags and enrolling in college. Some may join student government, some may take part in a club, others may devote all their time to studying instead. However, the majority of these students will come to meet a common element during their college experience: alcohol on campus. At first, I was inspired to take on the topic of opioid use in the country after seeing a billboard off of the highway about the topic. But because of my lack of knowledge and understanding of the threats presented by opioid usage, I chose a topic closer to home. Alcohol abuse. College drinking has been and continues to be an issue in the lives of students who have chosen to further their education. While many people accept alcohol on campus as part of life at a university, many points have been brought up about the problems that this particular substance presents to students. My personal goal is to gather and present the research that can justify UVU's current dry campus policy, and other university's similar policies. So, what are the consequences of college drinking for students?

The first source of information I could think of before searching through OneSearch was my textbook from the health course I was taking this semester. I remembered reading about alcohol abuse in the case of college students and decided to skim through the table of contents of Rebecca J. Donatelle's *Health: The Basics* to find the facts again. "Alcohol is the most popular

drug on college campuses: 67 percent of students' report having consumed alcoholic beverages in the past 30 days. Approximately 39 percent of all college students engage in binge drinking... According to a recent study, 1,825 college students die each year because of alcohol-related unintentional injuries, including car accidents. Consumption of alcohol is the number one cause of preventable death among undergraduate college students in the United States today" (240). These facts presented themselves in a threatening way, charging alcohol with the blame of many college student deaths. The textbook went into further detail about how susceptible freshman students are to alcohol abuse, which can lead down an unhealthy path, regretful decisions, and even the loss of life. Many programs have been implemented on college campuses that focus on teaching new students the dangers presented with binge drinking and alcohol use on campus in general (242). But I began to wonder, why had drinking on campus become such a dangerous activity? What kind of students had been leading this movement that was taking the most undergraduate lives?

Because of the stereotypes and proven research that I am familiar with, my mind directly pointed the blame finger of the majority of college binge drinking at student athletes. As a student athlete in high school, I was aware of the risky behavior that usually resides on teams, especially those with high egos. So, through OneSearch, I came to an article by Karie K. Huchting and other scholarly researchers from Loyola Marymount University, "Comparing Greek-Affiliated Students and Student Athletes: An Examination of the Behavior-Intention Link, Reasons for Drinking, and Alcohol-Related Consequences". Although I wasn't interested in the comparison between Greek-affiliated (fraternity or sorority) students and student athletes, I was interested in the reasoning behind why the research was being done in the first place. In this

article, many studies were referenced. “[According to one study,] Greek students and student-athletes have been identified as high risk groups for alcohol consumption when compared to the general population... Studies comparing Greek-affiliated to non-Greek-affiliated students find that Greek students drink more heavily and more frequently... One study by Meilman, Leichter, and Presley (1999) examined students who participated in either [Greek groups, athletic groups,] or both groups, and found that Greek-affiliated student athletes consumed the most alcohol; followed by Greek-affiliated non-athlete students, non-Greek student athletes, and then non-Greek and non-athlete (general) students.” (62). This information didn’t come as a surprise to me. I did think of college drinking as being a common activity in Greek life, but it didn’t really matter as much to me because fraternities and sororities are fairly uncommon and not very important on Utah college campuses. But I did question why the choices of these particular students mattered. Are Greek-affiliated students and student-athletes really not as responsible as the general student? Do they make better or worse choices when under the influence? Do these choices peer pressure general students into making dangerous decisions themselves during parties and other drinking activities?

When looking into the consequences of heavy drinking students, I encountered more OneSearch information on the outcomes of Greek life alcohol usage in Eric K. Soule’s journal article, “Protective behavioral strategies and negative alcohol-related consequences among US college fraternity and sorority members”. In this article’s research, fraternity and sorority members are found to make more choices called “protective behavioral strategies” than their non-Greek life counterparts. This includes: alternating between alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages, eating before/while drinking, pacing drinking, and using a designated driver (19).

These choices show control and experience when using alcohol, which is understandable if fraternity and sorority students are constantly surrounded by alcohol's influence. However, the research also shows that Greek-affiliated students suffer more consequences from alcohol use, like doing something that they regret, forgetting where they are, having unprotected sex, and physically injuring themselves. Although Greek-affiliated students are more likely to experience the negative outcomes of alcohol over usage, general students don't fall far behind, sometimes, even by as little as one percent according to Soule's research. However, the most dangerous alcoholic behavior, binge drinking, is 13 percent more likely to be found in Greek-affiliated students (9). Not everyone can join a top fraternity, sorority, or sports team on a whim. The minority of students find themselves within these groups, making their positions seem prestigious, intriguing, and unattainable. This influence might persuade general students to make the same decisions as the "elite minority", thus provoking the same behaviors and negative consequences of alcohol abuse.

This new idea and information of Greek life having a large impact on alcohol usage on college campuses still interested me, so I continued my exploration on OneSearch to find more information on the general facts of drinking in college. Jennifer E. Merrill and Kate B. Carey provided a few surprising facts in their journal article, "Drinking Over the Lifespan: Focus on College Ages". In this article, Merrill and Carey stated that, "A total of 646,000 physical assaults, 97,000 sexual assaults, [and] 599,000 unintentional injuries... are linked to alcohol use among college students annually" (104). The first fact I found at the beginning of my research about the 1,825 annual deaths didn't faze me. More than 6,000 people die in our country every day. But when I realized from Merrill and Carey's research that 1.3 million cases of physical and sexual

harm each year are due to college students' use of alcohol, I took my topic a lot more seriously. I really didn't care if someone's actions caused harm to themselves, but when other people are affected by another person's substance abuse, there shouldn't be any more facts to give to convince students to avoid alcohol abuse at all costs.

However, I needed to continue my search. I was curious to find more information about what happens to students at college who choose not to binge drink or drink at all. So, my last round on OneSearch brought me to Mickey Trockel's entry for *The Journal of Psychology*, "When the Party for Some Becomes a Problem for Others: The Effect of Perceived Secondhand Consequences of Drinking Behavior on Drinking Norms". This article explained how fraternities have changed drinking etiquette in the normal social setting. Trockel comes to the conclusion that fraternities have had a secondhand impact on all drinkers, in a negative manner (67). This made sense to me. Heavy drinking from certain fraternities may have given binge drinking a more serious and negative connotation than ever before. However, due to my confusion with the article's title, I found no information on the effect of college binge drinking on those who choose not to participate. Trockel's research assumes that drinking on campus is the norm, although many students, regardless of background, have chosen to go through college without alcohol's influence. So, I marched on through my research.

Unhappy with my last search results, I took my exploration to the trusted world wide web. I was still searching for the influence drinking college students have on abstaining students. However, after multiple questions asked in a search engine, I had given up on answering my last question. But instead, I came to a personal story by a young woman named Demi Vigren, who told her journey through college without consuming alcohol in her essay, "I Am A College

Student With 0% BAC”. In her piece, Vigren stated, “I love to have fun, but I guess my definition of fun differs from most college students' standards. I love meeting new people and dancing like a fool. I love going to the zoo, taking day trips to Chicago, going on picnics, and going to awesome concerts. But making out with random guys, drinking until you puke, and forgetting all of it the next morning does not sound appealing to me. Sorry if I am the weird one, according to everyone else, but I would rather explore the world around me, and meet new people who can actually speak without slurring their words” (Vigren). Although I believed many would consider her choices to be “boring” or “prudish”, I respected her. It takes a lot of guts to be the odd one out in a school where partying is considered more important and “the norm” compared to studying your passion.

In conclusion, I had more questions. However, I knew I wouldn't have the space or time to answer them. How does religion, the military, or club activity affect college drinking? Why is binge drinking considered normal, especially from the top universities in the world that are found in America? Why is binge drinking in college glorified? Why are students drinking underage in college? Although I may not have justified dry campus policies to someone else with my research, I'm content with my findings. Drinking causes many problems for college students, especially when they are still growing into adulthood. Many college students are still irresponsible, make more mistakes than the average adult, and are very impulsive people. So, with all the knowledge of the possible dangers of alcohol, would you put a can of beer in the hand of a 19 year-old? Just kidding. That's illegal.

Works Cited

- Donatelle, Rebecca J. *Health: The Basics*. 12th ed., Pearson, 2017, pp. 240-242.
- Huchting, Karie K, Andrew Lac, Justin F Hummer, and Joseph W. “Comparing Greek-Affiliated Students and Student Athletes: An Examination of the Behavior-Intention Link, Reasons for Drinking, and Alcohol-Related Consequences.” *Journal of Alcohol and Drug Education*, vol. 65, no. 61, 2011, pp. 61-72.
- Merrill, Jennifer E, and Kate B Carey. “Drinking Over the Lifespan: Focus on College Ages.” *Alcohol Research: Current Reviews 2016*, vol. 38, no. 1, 2016, pp. 103-114.
- Mickey, Trockel, Andrew Wall, Sunyna S. Williams, and Janet Reis. “When the Party for Some Becomes a Problem for Others: The Effect of Perceived Secondhand Consequences of Drinking Behavior on Drinking Norms.” *Journal of Psychology*, vol. 142, no. 1, 2008, pp. 57-71.
- Soule, Eric K, Tracey E Barnett, and Michael Moorhouse. “Protective behavioral strategies and negative alcohol-related consequences among US college fraternity and sorority members.” *Journal of Substance Use*, vol. 20, no. 1, 2015, pp. 16-21.
- Vigren, Demi. “I Am A College Student With 0% BAC”. *Odyssey*, <https://www.theodysseyonline.com/college-student-with-0-bac>. Accessed 31 July 2017.