



REPORT

Review of College Campus Alcohol Policy Research: Findings, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

The Cobb Alcohol Taskforce's Policy Strategy Team reviewed available college campus alcohol policy research for this report. This activity was designed to meet the following objectives:

- Assist college campus policy makers in assessing and evaluating the effectiveness of campus alcohol policy strategies for reducing excessive and underage drinking on campus
- Help identify gaps, loopholes, and areas for improvement
- Provide research and support for change

This report summarizes the results of the committee's findings, with the hope it will help policy makers and campus officials implement and evaluate evidence based alcohol policy strategies to help reduce excessive and underage drinking on college campuses in our community.

Overview of Findings

Prevention of alcohol problems directed at the environment generally relies on public policies (e.g., laws, rules, regulations) and other community-level interventions both to limit use and to alter the culture and contexts within which decisions about use are made. ¹

Because environmental management affects whole populations and creates changes in system wide processes, the potential of policy strategies to bring about relatively quick, dramatic, and enduring reductions in campus alcohol problems is based on community-based evidence. ^{1, 2, 3}

Environmental processes identified as contributing to college student alcohol abuse include; lax enforcement of school policies, campus social traditions centered on drinking, extensive marketing directed at students by the alcohol industry, the availability of alcohol, and campus social norms supportive of use. ^{1, 3, 4}

Strategies identified to combat these contributing environmental processes include; better policies that are clear, concise, well communicated and consistently enforced; notifying parents of student infractions; provision of more alcohol-free activities; RBS (responsible beverage server) programs; restrictions on alcohol marketing; changing social norms; substance-free housing; interventions with Greek organizations; and campus-community coalitions. ^{1, 3, 4}

Research on college drinking policies is a relatively young field, though research remains a high priority and ongoing projects continue to yield important new information. Schools across the country do not regularly base their prevention efforts on policy strategies identified and tested for effectiveness by research. ^{2, 3}

Without the expertise of the research community, administrators are at a disadvantage in trying to identify and implement policy strategies or combinations of strategies to address alcohol problems specific to their schools. ^{2, 3}

Although research can provide useful guidance to colleges in addressing the consequences of high-risk student drinking, presidential leadership is crucial to set plans in motion and support the actions needed to reverse the culture of drinking on campus.^{3,4}

Schools can significantly improve their responses to alcohol use and reduce their risk of exposure to liability. U.S. tort law concepts of duty complement Federal DFSCA regulations as the background against which colleges should assess their approach to campus alcohol policy.⁵

Tracking local data (CORE survey, students drinking patterns, Jeanne Clery crime statistics, etc.) provides useful information for assessing and evaluating various campus alcohol policies determined as having evidence or promise of effectiveness.^{3,4}

Federal regulations require colleges to provide a copy of their alcohol policy to students.⁶ With college students' increasing reliance on the Internet many colleges have responded by putting their alcohol policy online. However, many school's alcohol policy is difficult to find among all of the other information on a school's Web site.⁷

Criteria for measuring campus alcohol policy effectiveness: promote student learning; manage liability and risk; comply with federal mandates; effectively communicate standards for behavior; clearly define sanctions for violators; easily accessible for students, staff and parents; and are regularly and uniformly enforced and evaluated.^{1,3,4}

Student involvement can improve policies and compliance with policies by: reviews of proposed policies before they are finalized; judicial reviews by dormitory councils that hear cases of first alcohol infractions; and training of student residence hall staff to eliminate communication of mixed messages about alcohol use on campus and improve consistent enforcement of alcohol policies.^{1,3,4}

Although each school must carefully develop its own set of policies based on multiple considerations, there is consensus on the need to enforce policies firmly and consistently. The active, regular and uniform enforcement of alcohol-related laws and policies both on and off campus is critical to curbing high-risk drinking.^{1,2,3,4,8}

A close collaboration between colleges and their surrounding communities is a key factor in successful comprehensive approaches that include changes to environmental conditions that contribute to locally identified problems.^{1,2,3,8}

Multiple sources support a series of evidence-based strategies, some with policy implications, organized in four tiers as outlined herein:^{3,4,8}

Tier 1: Evidence of Effectiveness Among College Students:

- Combining cognitive-behavioral skills with norms clarification and motivational enhancement interventions;
- Offering brief motivational enhancement interventions; and
- Challenging alcohol expectancies.

Tier 2: Evidence of Success with General Populations that Could be Applied to College Environments:

- Increased enforcement of minimum drinking age laws;
- Implementation, increased publicity, and enforcement of other laws to reduce alcohol-impaired driving;
- Restrictions on alcohol retail outlet density;

- Increased prices and excise taxes on alcoholic beverages;
- Responsible beverage service policies in social and commercial settings; and
- The formation of a campus and community coalition involving all major stakeholders may be critical to implement these strategies effectively.

Tier 3: Evidence of Logical and Theoretical Promise, but Require More Comprehensive Evaluation:

- Adopting campus-based policies and practices that appear to be capable of reducing high-risk alcohol use such as:
 - reinstating Friday classes and exams to reduce Thursday night partying;
 - possibly scheduling Saturday morning classes;
 - implementing alcohol-free, expanded late-night student activities;
 - eliminating keg parties on campus where underage drinking is prevalent;
 - establishing alcohol-free dormitories;
 - employing older, salaried resident assistants or hiring adults to fulfill that role;
 - further controlling or eliminating alcohol at sports events and prohibiting tailgating parties that model heavy alcohol use;
 - refusing sponsorship gifts from the alcohol industry to avoid any perception that underage drinking is acceptable; and
 - banning alcohol on campus, including at faculty and alumni events.
- Increasing enforcement at campus-based events where excessive drinking is known to occur;
- Increasing publicity about and enforcement of underage drinking laws on campus and eliminating “mixed messages”;
- Consistently enforcing disciplinary actions associated with policy violations;
- Informing parents/guardians of alcohol offenses committed by students who are younger than age 21;
- Conducting marketing campaigns to correct student misperceptions about alcohol use;
- Provision of “safe rides” programs;
- Regulation of happy hours and sales; and
- Informing new students and their parents about alcohol policies and penalties before arrival and during orientation periods.

Tier 4: Evidence of Ineffectiveness:

- Informational, knowledge-based, or values clarification interventions about alcohol and the problems related to its excessive use, when used alone.
- Providing blood alcohol content feedback to students receiving lower grades overall.

Conclusions

- Evidence supports adopting, implementing, enforcing and evaluating comprehensive college alcohol policies as particularly effective in reducing excessive and underage drinking.
- Effective alcohol policies minimize opportunities for excessive and underage drinking; maximize opportunities for effective enforcement, adjudication, educational and other social interventions; and minimize campus exposure to risk.
- Presidential leadership is crucial to set plans in motion and support the actions needed to reverse the culture of drinking on college campuses, providing visibility and support for specific alcohol policy strategies.

- Use of local campus data (CORE survey, student drinking patterns, Jeanne Clery Campus Crime Statistics, etc.) is important and can inform the planning, implementation and evaluation of alcohol policy strategies.
- 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, on and off campus.

Recommendations

1. Establish and promote broad-based campus and community support and visibility for effective campus alcohol policy
2. Utilize local data to identify need and select policies that are based on research promise or evidence; then assess, implement, enforce and evaluate selected policies
3. Ensure campus alcohol policies are easily accessible; posted in one location on the school's Web site and with searches for terms relating to 'alcohol policy' linked directly to the complete campus alcohol policy

Bibliography

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