

## College Presidents Forum On Underage & Binge Drinking: One Communities' Success Story

### THE PROBLEM

**O**CCASIONAL DRINKING EXCESSES among young people of college age are nothing new. Indeed, some regard youthful experiments with alcohol as a "rite of passage" on the road to maturity. What we are confronted with today however, is a steady rise in high-risk drinking among students and a parallel rise in personal problems.

News headlines document the drinking marathons that end tragically in the death of students from alcohol poisoning. In addition, colleges and universities are seeing a wide range of other alcohol-related problems that are less conspicuous but no less serious for those involved, such as the consequences of unplanned sexual activity including sexual assault, personal injury, and vandalism on and around campuses." - The San Diego County "College Presidents' Forum on Underage and Binge Drinking" (The Forum)

College binge and underage drinking is a problem that society can no longer brush off or ignore. Binge drinking is not normal behavior at any age and this issue must be addressed. San Diego County is making progress in reducing college binge and underage drinking with a regional project that involves campus, public health, and public safety officials at every level.

San Diego area institutions of higher learning have joined with government agencies in an unprecedented regional effort to reduce underage and binge drinking among college students. The



by Ray DiCiccio

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San Diego County "College Presidents' Forum on Underage and Binge Drinking" (The Forum) has undertaken a bold new effort to reduce high-risk levels of alcohol consumption, which negatively impacts the health, safety, and academic progress of many students.

# THE FORUM

**I**N AN EFFORT to address and combat binge and underage drinking among college students, The San Diego County Policy Panel on Youth Access to Alcohol first convened The Forum on March 23, 2001. What was needed was a set of recommendations and goals that could be embraced by all concerned and could serve as the basis for a concentrated effort to change the social environment affecting college-age populations. Presidents and Chancellors of the San Diego academic community, leaders of local and state law enforcement, and public health agencies were brought together to add executive input towards strategy recommendations and to ratify the proposed policy agenda.

State Senator Dede Alpert of San Diego defined the challenge for the Forum, "For generations, the over-consumption of alcohol has been a rite of passage from high school to college; so widespread and so commonplace that it is now a cultural expectation. It is the norm in our society to allow high risk drinking. How do we change that norm? We've changed the norm about drunk driving. We've changed the norm about cigarette smoking. We have to work harder to change the social norms regarding alcohol among our college students. Today's Forum is not going to achieve a quick fix because those kinds of things take time. But your actions today can launch a process that will reverberate not only here in San Diego County but throughout the state of California."



Upon reviewing the alarming data regarding high-risk drinking behavior among college students, Forum participant Dr. Stephen Weber of San Diego State University stated, "There is more to the story of alcohol problems on and around our campuses than drunk driving fatalities and alcohol poisoning. We are seeing a wide range of other alcohol-related problems, such as date rape, unplanned sexual activity, scholastic failure, personal injury and vandalism. Indeed, there has been an increasing body of evidence from several of our nation's top public health institutions that indicate that underage and binge drinking is the most serious problem on our campuses today."

High risk drinking is an unacceptable societal norm that must be changed. Drinkers do not only hurt themselves, but those around them, and with potentially long term consequences. The Forum created a campus-community

collaboration to change permissive aspects of the social environment that condones drinking by students, and not only explained the nature of the problems addressed by each of the policy recommendations, but how the proposed strategies would help reduce those problems. At the culmination of this yearlong community organizing process, twenty-four college and university officials and community representatives signed an ambitious policy agenda (the proclamation) aimed at changing norms regarding high risk drinking by college students.

# THE PROCLAMATION

*Alcohol consumption by underage students and episodic heavy drinking by students of all ages are serious threats to the health, safety and academic progress of students in San Diego County. This Forum of college administrators, public health and safety executives, and student leaders is calling for collaboration by institutions of higher learning, students, prevention groups, local elected officials, law enforcement agencies, and alcohol retailers in a joint campus-community effort to reduce alcohol abuse in the student population. The Forum endorses the following policy recommendations as a comprehensive approach to reducing alcohol problems on and around our campuses by changing the physical, social, economic, and legal environment in which alcohol is made available.*



## **Recommendation 1: Law Enforcement**

Establish model enforcement policies and strategies by on-campus and off-campus law enforcement agencies to assure that underage drinking will not be tolerated and that those who participate in or contribute to it will face legal consequences.

## **Recommendation 2: Promotion of Alcoholic Beverages**

End the practice of promoting, advertising, and pricing of alcoholic beverages in ways that encourage underage and high-risk drinking.

## **Recommendation 3: Access to Alcohol**

Require alcohol licensees, sponsors of campus events, and social hosts to follow responsible beverage service practices, and support aggressive prosecution of those who violate California statutes on the sale and service of alcohol.

## **Recommendation 4: Campus Resources**

Make institutional resources available to support programs reducing the impact of alcohol on student health, safety, and academic success; by changing those conditions in the student environment that encourage or facilitate underage and high-risk drinking and by providing intervention and referrals for students experiencing alcohol-related problems.

## **Recommendation 5: Campus Housing**

On campuses that provide student housing, assure that students have access to housing that promotes safety and freedom from the adverse effects of alcohol.

## SUGGESTED STRATEGIES

The San Diego County College Presidents Forum wasn't just an event convened in a few months to highlight the problem alcohol poses to our students. It is an effort to coordinate multi-agency interventions aimed at creating safer and more productive environments for students, the university, and the surrounding community. The following is a list of the initial strategies developed by the Forum. They are listed (below) according to the policy recommendation they are most closely aligned with.

### LAW ENFORCEMENT

- 1 Create programs that provide substance abuse assessment, mandatory alcohol education for first-time offenders, and referral to an appropriate level of health services.
- 2 Assure that consistent zero-tolerance messages come from all college and university spokespersons.
- 3 Support enforcement of laws and penalties for adults who provide alcohol to minors.
- 4 Strengthen penalties for creating or possessing false IDs.
- 5 Sanction on campus organizations that would contribute to underage drinking.
- 6 Increase use of DUI checkpoints and other enforcement tactics in areas around campuses, and conduct random, periodic decoy and shoulder-tap operations in the vicinity of campuses.
- 7 Develop a system for community law enforcement agencies to report off-campus offenses involving students and alcohol to campus police.
- 8 Establish more collaboration among campus police, community polices and special events coordinators to assure compliance with drinking-age laws.
- 9 Promote the concept of a countywide "task force" that would unite on-campus and off-campus enforcement agencies with campus administrators,

community groups, and parents to reduce high-risk and underage drinking.

- 10 Assure that alcohol laws are respected and enforced in campus housing to the same degree as on public property.
- 11 Require special-event permits for campus events where alcohol will be available, assuring the events meet state licensing requirements and that servers are trained in responsible beverage service.

### PROMOTION OF ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES

- 1 Encourage counter-advertising that educates the public about the consequences of alcohol use.
- 2 Restrict on-campus marketing of alcoholic beverages, especially on campuses supported by public funds.
- 3 Pressure television and radio broadcasters to stop carrying alcohol ads that target youth, and to carry counter-ads that accurately portray the effects of alcohol.
- 4 Restrict alcohol sales at fundraising events attended by underage students, and restrict alcohol industry sponsorship of campus events.
- 5 Implement a media advocacy campaign prior to spring break, limit advertising of spring break specials, and discourage marketing that lures students to spring break holidays.
- 6 Provide alcohol-free alternative activities available

24 hours a day, seven days a week, such as fitness centers and libraries.

- 7 Promote alcohol-free events.
- 8 Encourage student leaders to conduct forums that disseminate accurate information about alcohol and its effects.
- 9 Educate and work with retailers throughout the county to eliminate reduced-price alcohol promotions or happy hours, especially in establishments near campuses.
- 10 Develop standards and guidelines for promotional activities to present to producers, distributors and retailers of alcoholic beverages.

#### ACCESS TO ALCOHOL

- 1 Require periodic responsible beverage service training for alcohol outlets in close proximity to campuses.
- 2 Restrict the on-sale and off-sale licensing of establishments in campus neighborhoods.
- 3 Promote the use of ID scanners at bars near campuses and other functions where alcohol is served.
- 4 Require responsible beverage service training for any on-campus alcohol outlets and in connection with any permit issued for campus events where alcohol is served.
- 5 Restrict access by minors to large campus events where alcohol is served, and require that security be provided to monitor the service of alcohol.
- 6 Develop campus-community partnerships to establish and gain compliance with responsible business standards for alcohol outlets in college areas.

#### CAMPUS RESOURCES

- 1 Develop an Alcohol and Other Drug Policy and ensure that all students receive an orientation explaining its provisions.
- 2 Provide an Alcohol and Other Drug office on every campus.
- 3 Provide resources for systematic collection and publication of data on alcohol use and related problems to assure that policies are based on need.
- 4 Include alcohol and drug education in the curriculum and establish a program such as "freshman success" to cover these issues.
- 5 Provide alcohol and drug education for parents.

#### CAMPUS HOUSING

- 1 On campus: Ensure available housing, which is free of alcohol and other drugs.
- 2 Use the San Diego Police Department's CAP program as a model for action in college housing.
- 3 Off campus: Develop alcohol policy planning enforcement for housing developments near campus.
- 4 Provide standards regarding alcohol for off-campus housing.

CONCLUSION

**T**HE FORUM PARTICIPANTS recognize that no report in and of itself can solve the problem of student binge drinking, but the problem cannot go unchallenged.

In spite of our best efforts, some students will continue to indulge in risky and perhaps illegal behavior. Nevertheless, we have an obligation to do all that we can.

The Forum participants want to develop a closer and more fruitful relationship between their campuses and the community in addressing alcohol problems. Their aim is to see local and state law enforcement agencies join campus enforcement in adopting model policies to assure that underage drinking, driving under the influence, and other alcohol-related violations will not be tolerated. They will continue to encourage more healthy, alcohol-free recreational and entertainment opportunities for students. They will offer help to students exhibiting early signs of alcohol dependency.

Since March 2001, much has been accomplished. San Diego State University (SDSU) has taken a lead role in the California State University System (CSU) statewide alcohol policy advisory councils (representing 23 CSU campuses). SDSU is providing facilitation and direction for the councils in their effort to implement the recommendations developed by the Chancellors Alcohol Policy Committee.

The University of San Diego (USD) has also taken a lead role in the development of a College Task Force of law enforcement officers representing both community and campus enforcement agencies. The goals of the Task Force are to institute strong, consistent zero tolerance messages, share information and resources, develop strategies to impact large parties, and develop new techniques for DUI checkpoints.

The Forum participants plan to reconvene the group in November 2002. Their goals are to first report on the progress on college campuses and in the community. Second to determine the future direction of the effort. As Manny Espinoza, Director of the California ABC stated, all eyes are on San Diego in hopes that the environmental management model they are implementing will make an impact on underage and binge drinking by college students.

SELF - ASSESSMENT TOOL

What can you do to prevent high risk drinking behaviors in your program or community? According to the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), the following strategies have proven successful:

- Comprehensive Alcohol Policies
- Alcohol-Free Alternative Activities
- Responsible Beverage Service (RBS)
- Environmental Prevention by Restricting Alcohol Advertising
- Social Norms Interventions
- Substance-Free Housing
- Interventions with At-Risk Populations
- Campus-Community Collaborations

From:  
Environmental Strategies to Prevent Alcohol Problems on College Campuses by OJJDP and Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation (PIRE)

What exactly is high-risk drinking and how does it impact students? According to The Harvard School of Public Health College Alcohol Survey (CAS), binge drinking is defined as five or more drinks on any one occasion for men, and four or more drinks on an occasion for women. This national survey, conducted in 1993, 1997, and 1999, has altered the way binge drinking is viewed across the Nation. In fact, it was CAS that first used the term “binge drinking” in regards to alcohol studies.

### ACCORDING TO THE 1999 CAS:

44 percent of students engaged in binge drinking during the two weeks prior to the survey

Students most likely to engage in this level of drinking are Caucasian, age 24 or younger, athletes, and/or members of a fraternity or sorority.

“CAS defines Binge Drinking as five or more drinks on an occasion for men, and four or more drinks on any one occasion for women.”

A higher percentage of binge-drinkers than non-binge-drinkers experienced alcohol related problems, such as missing class, falling behind in school work, not using protection when having sex, and driving a car after drinking.

If individuals were binge drinkers in high school, they were three times more likely to binge in college than those who had not experienced heavy drinking before.

The majority of students (56%) do not participate in binge behaviors however, they are still affected by those students who do. 71 percent of students have had their sleep or study interrupted by drinkers, 36 percent had been insulted or humiliated by an intoxicated student, and 23 percent had experienced an unwanted sexual advance.

CAS also reflected the low degree of compliance with the minimum drinking age among underage students:

Students under the age of 21 were found to drink more heavily than those over 21 and to have more serious problems with alcohol.

One-third of the campus binge-drinkers say they were also drinking at that level in high school.

Nearly half of students who drink say they do so in order to get drunk.

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# prevention **Tactics**

## RESOURCES:

A full report of the Forum and Underage Drinking Action Kits are available from the San Diego Policy Panel on Youth Access to Alcohol. Contact: The San Diego Policy Panel on Youth Access to Alcohol, 3851 Rosecrans Street, MS P-571, San Diego, CA 92186-85222 or call (619) 692-8475. [www.alcoholpolicypanel.org](http://www.alcoholpolicypanel.org).

The Harvard School of Public Health College Alcohol Study (CAS). Available online at <http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/cas>

OJJDP Center for Enforcing Underage Drinking Laws. Various publications available online at <http://www.udetc.org/> including "Strategies to Reduce Underage Alcohol Use: Typology and Brief Overview" and "Environmental Strategies to Prevent Alcohol Problems on College Campuses".

Underage Drinking Prevention: Action Guide and Planner. Available from The Department of Health and Human Services, SAMSHA, at <http://www.samhsa.gov/centers/csap/csap.html>

## LET'S HEAR FROM YOU!

We welcome readers' comments on topics presented.



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## prevention **Tactics**

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RESOURCES

**Tactics** (tak'tiks) n. **1.** a plan for promoting a desired end.  
**2.** the art of the possible.