

## Alcohol abuse – A major problem on college campuses

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Substance abuse, particularly alcohol, is a major problem on college campuses. The United States National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (1) reports that approximately 60% of young American college students aged 18-22 years report drinking in the past month and 40% of students binge drink. About 13% of students admit being heavy drinkers, drinking five or more drinks on occasion on five or more occasions per month. Approximately 20% of college students meet the criteria for alcohol use disorder, but only five percent seek treatment. This pattern of drinking results in 1825 college students dying from alcohol-related unintentional injuries a year and high numbers of assaults, sexual abuse, unsafe sex, and drunk driving. A quarter of college students report academic consequences from drinking, including missing class, falling behind in class, doing poorly on exams or papers, and receiving lower grades overall.

Many students, who are in recovery from alcohol abuse, find returning to college difficult because student life frequently involves socializing with other students at events where alcohol plays a prominent role. Recovering students may feel that they are missing out on this part of college life. This coupled with the academic stresses associated

with college can lead to the resumption of their addictive behavior.

The U.S. Education Department (2) said that to reach President Obama's goal of making the United States the top producer of college graduates by 2020, institutions must address the pervasive substance abuse that causes student academic, social and health problems. One important means of dealing with the problem is through collegiate recovery programs.

The Association of Recovery in Higher Education defines a collegiate recovery program as "a supportive environment within the campus culture that reinforces the decision to disengage from addictive behavior. It is designed to provide an educational opportunity alongside recovery support to ensure that students do not have to sacrifice one for the other (3)." Recovery programs such as those at Texas Tech University and Georgia Southern University provide multiple support mechanisms for preventing relapse. They are part of an ever-growing number of programs ranging from housing recovering students together with those that provide only weekly campus meetings. The Center for Addiction Recovery (CAR) at Georgia Southern University (GSU) is modeled after the highly successful center at Texas Tech

University. CAR serves students in long-term recovery from alcoholism and drug addiction. Students involved with the Center attend weekly one-hour seminars that serve to build community and develop life skills in small group settings. Discussion topics range from academics and personal achievement to health and spirituality. Throughout the semester the Center hosts connection events to bring students from different seminar groups together to build and deepen community. Students also receive individualized academic advising and early registration to help them acclimate to college life. They attend leadership retreats where they focus on team-and community-building, have the opportunity to study abroad, and opportunities to speak to various community groups about their struggle with alcoholism. Students also participate in all recovery evenings where communication and openness is encouraged among various GSU recovery communities.

Although collegiate recovery programs are important for students who recognize their alcohol drinking problems and manage to refrain from drinking and

enter a recovery program, there are large numbers of students who abuse alcohol but never recognize their problem or never seek help. It is important that universities and colleges address these students. Successful efforts to address these problems frequently involve prevention, intervention, and treatment strategies. These strategies must not only address the individual student, but also the whole student body and the broader college community. Colleges need alcohol screening and intervention programs conducted by the campus health centers. In addition to programs for individual students, the entire college community needs to be educated about alcohol, work with the local community to enforce underage drinking laws, and provide campus activities that are alcohol-free.

Strong support from college and community leaders to develop a comprehensive program of evidence-based strategies to combat harmful student drinking is required if we have any chance of meeting President Obama's goal of making the United States the top producer of college graduates.

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## References

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3. Association of Recovery in Higher Education. URL: <http://collegiaterecovery.org/>.