The Bill Blackwood Law Enforcement Management Institute of Texas

Police Response to Binge Drinking in the University Environment

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ABSTRACT

The problems associated with college student binge drinking have reached epidemic proportions and resulted in many negative effects on campuses and surrounding cities. Binge drinking has captured national attention with the rise of the problems associated with this type of addictive behavior. Criminal Mischief, Driving While Intoxicated, Assault, Sexual Assault and unplanned sex are but a few of the associated problems.

The university is a learning environment and should be used to promote positive learning experiences, healthy choices, and good decision making skills. All the resources of the university must be utilized to their fullest extent to provide a meaningful learning experience that will provide a positive future for the students.

The purpose of this study is to provide the university with a better definition of binge drinking and a procedure to address the issue. The police department has direct contact with the students and should provide support to the university's decision on the course of action to follow. Since each university is a microcosm of society, each university will have a unique set of problems as well as a unique way of addressing those problems.

As binge drinking is being identified as more of a social problem, the university administration will best be able to address the problem through allocation of resources for research, development, and implementation of the course of action realized from the research. The police department is generally relegated to fair and equitable enforcement of the university's decisions and has not historically had a place in directing social change. This researcher recommends a continued effort in consistent enforcement of the law and policy and further, to provide support and assistance to the university administration in the course of action chosen to combat binge drinking.

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Introduction

Binge drinking has been identified as the most prevalent problem facing administrators in the campus environment today. Focus on this issue, from the law enforcement perspective, has been mainly in the area of zero-tolerance enforcement of the existing laws and university policies.

The research will identify the depth of the alcohol problem and search for a more defined policy to assist law enforcement officers in dealing with binge drinking at Southern Methodist University. This research will also provide information to the rest of the university and give administrators an opportunity to adapt it for use in a new campus alcohol policy.

Binge drinking in the campus environment has grown to epidemic proportions and has instituted a change in the social morays, which define acceptable behavior. Binge drinking has caused problems in areas such as academics, vandalism, assault, sexual assault, and unplanned sexual activity. While once considered a "right of passage" for most students, university officials as well as society as a whole should become aware of the far-reaching implications of this type of addictive behavior.

This research will be available to university officials of Southern Methodist University and the command staff of the police department. The research will also be available to the command staff of the University Park Police Department and the Highland Park Department of Public Safety, since the problems associated with this behavior will be in evidence throughout the surrounding communities.

Information will be taken from campus policies and programs, law enforcement journals, medical journals, and interviews with campus officials. Campus policies that are in place on an experimental basis will be considered only as they are evaluated over an adequate period of time.

This information should assist Southern Methodist University in identifying effective policies, procedures, and practices within the campus environment.

This information should identify binge drinking as either a social or law enforcement problem, and place the primary responsibility of addressing the issue on the organization which is best suited to address the issue in an effective manner. It can also be considered if Southern Methodist University Police

Department should expand its involvement to areas other than enforcement of existing laws and involve itself in education to promote social change.

Historical, Legal, and Theoretical Context

Binge drinking is defined as consumption of four drinks in one sitting by a female and five drinks in one sitting by males. The phrase "binge drinking" was introduced by Dr. Henry Wechsler of the Harvard School of Public Health in the early 1990s when his group of researchers began studying the rise of alcohol abuse in the college environment. (Wechsler; Kelley; Weitzman; Giovanni; Seibring, 2000). Among the university setting, the problems associated with this type of behavior are becoming a major focal point of available resources. Drinking in the college environment has historically been thought of as a right of passage, but recent findings have indicated a rise in this and other types of addictive behavior as a source associated with criminal activity that adversely impacts the learning environment. (Wechsler, 1996).

A 1993 study by the Harvard School of Public Health indicated that nearly one half of the students in universities, nationwide, were binge drinkers. The actual rates varied according to the particular university, ranging from one percent binge drinkers to a high of seventy percent.

The major factor predicting binge drinking was found to be membership to a fraternity or

sorority. The study found eighty percent of females living in sorority houses were binge drinkers and eighty-six percent of fraternity house residents were found to be binge drinkers. Women belonging to sororities were found to be nearly twice as likely to binge drink compared to non sorority women. Residents of fraternity and sorority houses are four times more likely to binge drink compared to other students. (Wechsler; Dowdall; Dejong, 1995).

Binge Drinking has its origin in behavior that is brought into the university environment from the high school level. The college environment does, however, increase the number of students who did not binge drink in high school. At high-binge colleges where more than half the students are binge drinkers, about two of five students who did not binge in high school reported binge drinking while they were in the college environment. It was also noted that colleges with higher binge drinking rates attracted more students who were binge drinkers in high school. (Lyall, 1995).

In 1999, the Harvard School of Public Health released the findings of their latest College Alcohol Study (CAS). The rate of binge drinking stayed fairly consistent compared to the findings of the initial study in 1993. The report notes that alcohol abuse has become more extreme with students drinking greater amounts of alcohol more often. The number of drinkers who frequently binged rose approximately five percent between the 1993 study and the 1999 study. (Wechsler; Nelson; Weitzman, 2000). College students who binge drank in high school are three times more likely to binge drink in college. White students and students who had little regard for their religious beliefs are twice as likely to be binge drinkers. Student athletes, who regarded their sports activity as important, are one and one-half times more likely to be binge drinkers in college. College binge drinkers are seven to sixteen times more likely to miss class,

have unplanned sex, have unprotected sex, get behind in class, damage property, or get injured. (Wechsler; Dowdall; Dejong, 1995).

Senator Joseph R. Biden proposed an U.S. Senate resolution to address the college binge drinking issue. S. R. 192 called the "Collegiate Initiative to Reduce Binge Drinking" was also introduced under the same name as H. R. 321 by Representative Joseph Kennedy II. These resolutions call for university leaders to adopt principles to address the issues surrounding the issue of binge drinking and its associated behaviors. (CSPI Action Alert, 1998).

More than one-half of all frequent binge drinkers have driven a vehicle after consuming alcohol. In a 1993 report, the Robert Johnson Foundation documented that alcohol abuse contributes to almost one-half of all vehicle accident fatalities. This number alone should provide reason enough to prompt a call for dramatic change. While the number of vehicle fatalities may have reduced over the past nine years, this may be attributed to better vehicle design and better medical attention, rather than a reduction of driving while intoxicated.

Changing social and political norms is a long-term project that will require administrators to adhere to the reality of the need for change. Historically, administrators have relied on education response to the problem of substance abuse. The effort in this area should be continued, but that is not enough, in adequately addressing such a complex and far reaching problem as binge drinking. A broad approach should be implemented to change the social environment wherein students decide to use alcohol. Administrators must first become aware of the need for change and then motivate the institution to facilitate that change. One is either motivated to change or unmotivated and in denial. The adverse consequences of maintaining the status quo is outweighed by the positive effects that would be reaped from effective change in the social norms within the learning environment Southern Methodist University is a private

school and relies on private donations and tuition for funds for its survival. Radical and abrupt changes in policy will lead to negative reactions from students and alumni, as seen in recent riots as several universities. Change in the status quo of the university may bring unwelcome reprisals such as social unrest and a drop in funding and enrollment, but a change must be made to promote a healthy learning environment for all students.

Second hand effects of binge drinking are suffered by a large majority of all students even at universities having binge drinking rates below thirty-five percent. Second hand effects include property damage, assault, caring for the intoxicated, study interruptions caused by intoxicated students, litter, unprotected sex, and unwanted sexual advances. On campuses that reported a binge drinking rate over fifty percent, eighty-seven percent of the campus residents reported one or more problems from the binge drinking students. (Wechsler 1996). The need for a safe and adequate learning environment should demand a change in addressing the alcohol problems facing the student body as a whole.

Review of Literature or Practice

The College Alcohol Study Program (CAS) by the Harvard School of Public Health has provided a clearer definition of the problems associated with binge drinking in universities across America. While first thought to be a college right of passage, binge drinking has been defined as a social problem that requires a change in social attitudes. A solution must include the faculty, staff, students, and parents in order to bring a lasting change. Most universities have a written policy on alcohol issues that provide general guidelines addressing possession, consumption, and enforcement measures. These policies are often overlooked and do not receive the needed attention during the enrollment orientation of new students and their parents. The

parents must be afforded that opportunity to make informed decisions on the environment that they will be placing their children.

In the 1999 CAS (College Alcohol Survey) the researchers also looked at specific programs that the university had in place and what steps were being taken. The investments made by the institution to reduce binge drinking through prevention initiatives were inconsistent. A majority of college administrators reported a designated official in charge of the preventative measures. However, the researchers noted a clear incongruence in the prevalence of investment by the institution and the response required by the study. Those programs that required more personnel and community involvement were less common and cooperative agreements were rare. (Wechsler; Kelley; Weitzman; Giovanni; Seibring, 1999). It appears that the colleges involved in this study were aware of the problem of binge drinking, but were not providing adequate resources to address the issue.

University of Nebraska-Lincoln Chancellor's Task Force on Conduct Standards and Behavioral Expectations published a report in 1996 defining numerous problems surrounding alcohol consumption and provided recommendations. The report states a national trend exists in both confusion about and tolerance of negative behaviors in a campus environment and notes a growing decline in behavioral standards and accountability for individual actions. The Task Force made several recommendations to address the issues they found to be of importance during the study. Without surprise, a "zero-tolerance" policy towards abusive and violent behavior was the first recommendation. These types of behavior have been demonstrated to be resultant factors of alcohol abuse. The second recommendation was to consistently enforce the existing alcohol policy already in place. The Task Force identified inconsistent enforcement as a problem with the existing system of adjudication of alcohol related offenses. In some cases

where two or more violations were observed, such as vandalism while the student was intoxicated, the alcohol portion was used as an excuse or even ignored when sanctions were imposed. The study also concluded that the number of commissioned officers was inadequate compared to national standards. The Task Force recognized the need to meet or exceed the number of officers assigned to enforcement. Inadequate staffing will lead to inadequate and inconsistent enforcement of the regulations. Crisis groups on campus must coordinate their efforts in order to address all the issues surrounding a specific problem. Adequate networking may prevent a problem from being overlooked. A student with alcohol violations, academic problems, difficulties with roommates and psychological problems indicate a student in dire need of help. If all the different entities fail to communicate, the full picture of that student may be missed and help may come to late to be effective. (Chancellor's Task Force, 1996)

In 1997, Ohio Parents for Drug Free Youth approached the binge drinking problem on an environmental approach. They recognized the need to counteract the normal college environment that promoted alcohol consumption. This state wide program provided training, support, and planning to enact a program focused on changing the social norms and environment of college campuses state wide. Meetings provided opportunities to openly discuss the problems and to elevate awareness of the issues to the members of the campuses and communities. The first year showed increasing participation of all facets of the issue. (Ohio Parents for Drug Free Youth, 1997).

Central Michigan University seeks to manage the problems associated with binge drinking rather than attempt to solve them. Leadership of this effort comes from the Student Health Promotion/Disease Prevention Programming Group comprised of representatives from campus police, health services, resident life, and student organizations. The largest focus is

centered on extensive awareness and information. They provide information through health fairs, fliers, and various campus activities. Peer based organizations provide substance abuse education to various student groups on campus. CMU mandates all athletic team members complete a credit course on "Drugs and the Athlete." The campus and community require a "zero-tolerance" approach to alcohol abuse. Police issue citations for violations and offenders face higher fines for subsequent offenses. Students are required to attend an educational class on alcohol discipline. (Anderson; Milgram, 1996).

The University of Texas at Austin utilizes a harm reduction approach to reduce the negative consequences associated with substance abuse. Campus Alcohol and Drug Education Program (CADEP) is based on abstinence approach, but is not abstinence-only based. The methods follow a theory that behavior can be placed on a continuum from beneficial to harmful consequences. The goal of the program is to move the subject along that continuum until the individual has adapted to healthier alternatives. CADEP uses a peer outreach program to provide assistance for individuals facing substance abuse problems. The students who provide the assistance are trained in one-on-one consultations and receive academic credits for their efforts. CADEP provides confidential and private counseling and early intervention programs free of charge. The program staffs the Designated Driver Program (UT -DDP) to provide taxi rides to any student who is too intoxicated to drive. (Anderson; Milgram, 1996).

University of Colorado, in the wake of recent social unrest surrounding the alcohol policy of the university, has adopted a wide range of services in an effort to curb issues surrounding the problems associated with alcohol abuse. The programs emphasize strategies from promoting healthy alternatives and ways to address the alcohol problems. Incoming students are shown a video to correct misperceptions of alcohol abuse and uses students to present the reason s for not

using alcohol. The university provides alternatives for recreation on weekend nights in an effort to provide more acceptable uses of the student's time. A local judge conducts mock date-rape trials to emphasize one problem associated with binge drinking behavior. Peer based programs provide information on alcohol, violence, dating, and other health related issues. The programs promote healthy choices to students in a non-threatening venue. Credit courses are available in contemporary issues of alcohol abuse, academics, and campus resources. The programs used at Colorado State University are all based on a community partnership approach where the entire university community is involved and social norms are defined with an emphasis on healthy alternatives. (Anderson; Milgram, 1996).

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (1996) administration believes the most productive approach for combating binge drinking is through creative abuse prevention programs. (University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1996). Texas A&M University (1997) base their alcohol abuse policy on objectives ranging implementation of prevention programs to rehabilitation availability for students in appropriate circumstances. (Texas A&M University, 1997). The University of Wisconsin-Stout (1998) approaches binge drinking by providing informative information about the consequences of alcohol and drug abuse. (University of Wisconsin-Stout, 1998). The wide range of programs studied indicates a need for a clear definition of the actual needs of the individual institution.

Several universities are using various methods to promote healthy alternatives to substance abuse. Drug-free on-campus housing provides a safe environment for the students who do not wish to use alcohol or illicit drugs and do not want to be subjected to the effects of those students who do. Zero-tolerance for alcohol consumption at sporting events was stated in every study at each university studied. Effective programs demonstrated a multi-faceted

approach that includes media advocacy, curriculum infusion, campus environment change, and peer education/counseling. All the programs emphasize cooperation between students, faculty, staff, and administration. While education on alcohol has shown to raise awareness of the issues of binge drinking, behavioral interventions have proven more adequate at curbing the proliferation of binge drinking. Giving the students the knowledge and tools to make informed decisions is the very point of an adequate college level education. Future generations rely on the ability for this generation to make good decisions based on fact. Giving information to an open mind is only one-half of the process. Showing that same open mind how to use that information is where true education lies.

Discussion of Relevant Issues

Binge drinking in colleges around the country is a serious problem that requires a contemplative and innovative approach to assure adequate attention is given to this problem. Binge drinking has also been identified as a social problem starting well before the college years. Police response to this behavior has been and will continue to be consistent enforcement of the laws and policies that govern the university community. Key areas of concern include the Greek system present in the community. A vast majority of binge drinkers are involved in the Greek system and efforts should be focused to change the social ideas of these groups. If the university can bring about change in the social norms of these leaders of the student body, then they will in turn set new social norms for the entire university. Efforts to make that change should be initiated in the venue where most of the students are affected. The police department is charged with the enforcement of lay and policy, but does not have a well-defined position as an agency to

promote social change. Changing society and social norms will require efforts in all areas, but the enforcement arm of the process should not be the starting point for change.

In a speech before British Parliament, Sir Edmund Burke stated that for democracy to be effective, the "four estate" (executive and legislative power, organized religion, the people, and the media) must come together for the common good. (Cahalan, 1991). Cooperation is often thought of as a great concept, but seldom practiced to the fullest extent of the concept. Cooperation must start with the leadership of any group, but the general public's support is also required for the success of any program. A systematic effort must begin with the president of the university. Since each university is unique, an assessment must be done to measure the extent of the problem. The next step requires that the college actually admit that is has an alcohol problem. The prevalence of binge drinking on college campuses is no secret and can not be ignored without giving the impression that the administration condones such disruptive behavior in the learning environment. A long term effort should be planned with the involvement of everyone on campus. Since the problem of binge drinking effects the entire community, then everyone should be part of the solution. As with most universities, Southern Methodist University is deep with tradition and everyone will not readily accept change of any tradition. A strong showing of leadership will be required for success of any program aimed at changing the social values of the students.

There are numerous prevention and treatment programs in use on college campuses, but few have been evaluated as to the effectiveness versus the costs of the program. Programs based on providing cognitive behavior skills are among the most widely accepted and successful programs in lowering binge drinking. The programs associated with providing a voice for the non-alcohol drinking student body, such as substance-free housing, have also received acclaim.

(Finn, 1996). Adequate assessment of the individuality of the university will be required to provide a form and rate of change that will be acceptable to all.

The historic role of the SMU Police Department has been protection of the students and their learning environment. This was achieved in some cases by protecting them from the legal process that accompanies some of their behavior and utilizing the Student Judicial Process for correction. The resultant effects of this type of protective policy have not provided adequate correction of the increasing problems of binge drinking. The department must make a strong stand on a position of concern for the overall learning environment of the student, with an emphasis on safety, education, and social responsibility. Enforcement of the laws and policies should be straightforward and not insulate a student from responsibility.

The recent construction and increased costs of providing services, has caused some concern for budgetary constrictions. The SMU Police Department is not adequately funded to provide for change-oriented programs nor does it alone, possess the power to initiate the change process. The department does have a responsibility to assist in the education and the enforcement policies that the administration decides to pass. Each officer has the duty to educate students in crime prevention methods and providing information to help students make informed decisions is fulfilling a portion of that duty. While the department may not be able to implement long term social-change programs, it does have the duty to provide information to those in power to make change possible.

Conclusions/Recommendations

This research was meant to identify the problem of binge drinking and suggest a course of action that may be selected by the Southern Methodist University as a whole and the police

department in particular. The programs and policies used by other universities provide a guide for developing a specific set of policies and programs directed toward SMU's unique problems. Binge drinking at SMU has risen over the past several years and if this trend continues, the university's ability to provide a safe learning environment will be negatively affected. The dangers of binge drinking alone necessitate prompt action. The associated secondary dangers of binge drinking make it clear that the situation is unacceptable and requires making the necessary changes now. If approximately one-half of the students at SMU contracted influenza, it would be generally accepted that there was an influenza epidemic. The dangers of binge drinking are longer lasting and more dangerous than influenza, but receive little more that a passing notice. The universities decision to promote alcohol consumption prior to football games has produced negative effects in the safety and security of the campus environment. The information gained from this study indicates that no school sponsored events should tolerate any type of alcohol consumption. The most important issue found in this research focused on the institution to accept that a problem exists and make immediate efforts to address the problem.

Southern Methodist University should attack the problem in a logical process aimed at progress in terms of years. Binge drinkers did not form overnight and the problems will not be fixed in a few weeks. The first phase to address this issue will be a study of SMU's unique culture and social norms. After that process identifies and quantifies the situation, the university can begin to design and implement programs to teach about alcohol abuse and the dangers associated with binge drinking. These educational programs will need to include all members of the university as well as the student's parents. Educational programs can provide students the necessary tools to avoid binge drinking and make informed decisions on healthier and more

positive activities. Universities that focus their programs on educational efforts overlook the environment that condones, supports and even encourages binge drinking.

Existing programs that provide assistance for students already addicted to alcohol can be increased and enhanced to mimic the success of other universities' programs. Safe and healthy alternative activities can be planned for students during the weekends to void the "party school" reputation. These steps will require an infusion of money that will need to be appropriated from programs that are found to be ineffective or out dated. The university has the duty to provide a reasonably safe environment for learning and with the prevalence of binge drinking, that environment can not exist. Substance-free housing should be addressed to protect students who do not wish to be part of a drinking and substance using culture. This program will require an extreme amount of logistical preparation and has been met with approval from several universities.

One situation that is seldom publicly mentioned involves tailgate parties at sporting events. SMU must rethink the decision to encourage alcohol consumption on campus prior to football games. The decision to allow tailgate parties on campus was clearly meant to get more students and alumni involved in the sporting events on campus. Any attempt to decrease alcohol abuse through policy, should also apply to visitors and alumni. SMU must reevaluate this program by basing their decision on the lesser of two evils: Decrease in alumni and community support and contributions or a large court settlement to families of injured or deceased students.

The police department must provide consistent and fair enforcement of existing policies and laws as well as assisting various offices involved in presenting new programs. The department will remain the focal point of crime prevention and awareness presentations with an emphasis on binge drinking and its associated problems. A free flow of information must be

allowed between all offices providing services and training. The offices of Student Life, Student Housing, Student Program Council, and Greek organizations must promote the types of changes suggested by the research group. The students must also have a voice, as well as a part, in changes affecting their environment.

The university must allow time for programs to work and even then, not all programs will work as desired. The university must discard the programs that do not produce a positive change and forge ahead with other programs until the desired affect is obtained. Binge drinking should not be thought of as a right of passage, but rather a bad habit of the past. Future generations are counting on the leaders of today to help the leaders of tomorrow make sound decisions that will definitely influence the world of tomorrow. The decision to start the process is necessary now. The programs to shift social norms will take years to show improvement, but starting now is imperative.

While each university studied had a very personalized structure to their approach, the one consistent quality was fair and equitable enforcement of all the laws and policies governing the particular university. The police department can not enact social change by itself. The response the SMU Police Department to binge drinking should focus on enforcement, but should also lend itself to a support role to help with any program the university should decide to implement.

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