



College Students and Alcohol Use

Heavy alcohol use by college students can lead to a cascade of alcohol-related problems, such as increased chances of risky behavior, lowered GPAs, and lowered income potential.¹ In a 2005 nationwide survey of college students, 44.8 percent of students were classified as “binge” drinkers—consuming five or more drinks on at least one occasion in the past 30 days.² College student alcohol use hurts student drinkers and the surrounding community. Strategies to reduce college underage and binge drinking include community and environmental policy changes and the enforcement of laws and regulations.

Who drinks and how much?

- Binge drinking peaks at ages 21-23 (49.9 percent at age 21, 46.6 percent at age 22, and 47.7 percent at age 23).³
- College students had more occasions of heavy drinking, defined as five or more drinks in a row, within the past 30 days than non-college adolescents of the same age (40 percent vs. 35 percent).⁴
- 19.5 percent of full-time college students, aged 18-22, were considered heavy drinkers compared to 13.0 percent of people in the same age group who were not enrolled full-time in college.⁵
- College students who drank at least once a month during their senior year in high school had a more than three times greater likelihood to begin binge drinking in college than students who drank less frequently in high school.⁶
- 12.7 percent of students begin drinking beer over the course of their first year in college.⁷ First-year students drink less frequently but more heavily than upper-class students.⁸
- 74.7 percent of athletes attending NCAA Division I schools used alcohol. 74.5 percent of athletes at NCAA Division II schools and 81.5 percent of athletes in NCAA Division III schools used alcohol.⁹
- College students who were sports fans were more likely to engage in binge drinking behavior, including adopting extreme drinking styles and participating in drink price specials and beer-company-promoted promotions.¹⁰
- Student membership in Greek organizations strongly predicts heavy alcohol use.¹¹
- College males have a higher prevalence of heavy drinking occasions (50 percent) compared to college females (34 percent).¹²

Where do students drink or obtain alcohol?

- 87 percent of college students said it was “very” or “somewhat” easy for students under 21 to get alcohol.¹³
- Most college students obtain alcohol at off-campus parties and off-campus bars.¹⁴
- Fewer students attend fraternity parties than off-campus bars, but more of those who attend fraternity parties consume alcohol heavily than students who drink in off-campus establishments.¹⁵
- Multiple alcohol outlets are often located near colleges, especially schools with high binge-drinking rates. Higher outlet density is associated with an increased perception of alcohol availability, lower retail price through competition, lower total cost to drinkers (including travel time), increased alcohol consumption, and more alcohol-related problems.¹⁶
- Students in “wet” environments, in which binge drinking is common and encouraged, alcohol is cheap, and it is easily obtained, are more likely to start binge drinking in college than peers who are not in “wet” environments.¹⁷
- Most underage students get alcohol from legal-drinking-age students, but an increasing number of underage students report receiving alcohol from parents or relatives.¹⁸

What are the implications of college alcohol consumption?

- **Alcohol-users:**

- In 2005, 12.3 percent of full-time college students met the DSM-IV diagnostic criteria for alcohol abuse and 7.7 percent met the criteria for alcohol dependence.¹⁹
- At least 50 percent of college student sexual assault cases are attributed to alcohol abuse. 62 percent of men blamed alcohol for committing rape. Women felt more responsible for sexual assault if they had consumed alcohol beforehand.²⁰
- 13.6 percent of college students (15.6 percent male and 12.5 percent female) reported having unprotected sex in the past 12 months as a result of their own drinking.²¹
- Underage students more often did something they regretted, forgot where they were or what they did, caused property damage, got into trouble with police, and/or got hurt or injured when they used alcohol, compared to off-age students.²²
- Students experiencing 3 or more alcohol-induced blackouts show signs of problem-drinking; they tend to drink more often and more heavily, have lower GPAs, began drinking at an earlier age, drank more during their senior year in high school, and often have had others express concerns about their drinking.²³

- **Secondhand effects:**

- The most common secondhand effects are: property damage and vandalism (both on and off campus), fights and interpersonal violence, sexual violence, and disruption to other students' quality of life.²⁴
- Colleges and universities often end up paying for the effects of student drinking. Monetary costs include: campus property damage (dorms, concerts, stadiums, etc.), lost tuition from drop outs and failures, college personnel who have to deal with the alcohol-related issues, college counseling centers, security staff, administrative hearings on academic and disciplinary cases, legal costs of suits against college for liability. Intangible costs include: strains in the relationship between colleges and the surrounding community, a diminished reputation, and the time lost and stress felt by college administrators and personnel who work on alcohol-related issues.²⁵
- 49 percent of students attending colleges where 40 percent or more of the student body identified themselves as sports fans felt three or more negative effects of alcohol use.²⁶
- Students living off-campus or in substance-free dorms experienced fewer secondhand effects of alcohol use than students living in fraternity or sorority houses.²⁷
- People living within one mile of a college campus report more community problems such as noise, disturbances, vandalism, and drunkenness than those living more than one mile from campus.²⁸

Updated August 2007

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